



2020/2021



COMMEMORATIVE PROGRAM



## 2020/2021 A YEAR IN REVIEW

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Opera Omaha is exceedingly grateful to those corporations, foundations and government organizations whose generous support has ensured Opera Omaha continues to serve our region.

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The Nebraska Arts Council, a state agency, has supported this program through its matching grants program funded by the Nebraska Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Visit [www.nebraskaartscouncil.org](http://www.nebraskaartscouncil.org) for information on how the Nebraska Arts Council can assist your organization, or how you can support the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

THANK YOU





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## DEAR FRIENDS,

I am profoundly grateful to greet you after one of the most difficult years imaginable. It's been a period of isolation, turmoil, and loss. Through it all, Opera Omaha strove to be a source of comfort and celebration; to share joy to the greatest extent possible and to the best of our ability. Now, with the return to large-scale live performances this spring, we offer this publication as a commemoration of the many ways Opera Omaha has endeavored to *serve*, *create*, and *connect* in the face of so many challenges – and to thank the many people and institutions who made it possible.

With ingenuity and innovation, Opera Omaha found new ways to serve the community. Not surprisingly during a pandemic, much of this work took place online. Through a generous act of the Douglas County Commissioners and the Omaha Community Foundation, funds from the Federal CARES Act supported the creation of a new Opera Omaha digital production studio. This new equipment enabled us to produce and share high-quality digital content for our patrons, community partners, and even opera fans around the country. It also helped us transform our free annual summer concert, *Opera Outdoors*, into a live radio broadcast last August in partnership with our wonderful colleagues at KVNO.

Opera Omaha's primary conduit to the community throughout the past year remained the Holland Community Opera Fellowship. The hard-working Holland Fellows stayed in touch with, and in service to, countless others throughout the pandemic. We are so proud that the Holland Community Opera

Fellowship has garnered the attention of major institutions supporting creative placemaking across the country. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), OPERA America, Hearst Foundation, and, locally, the Peter Kiewit Foundation, the Fred and Eve Simon Charitable Foundation, and the Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation, are currently underwriting Opera Omaha's Fellowship. Our national funders have commissioned a formal case study about the Fellowship that will be disseminated nationwide. We are exceedingly grateful to these funders as well as the Holland Foundation who made this program, and so much of Opera Omaha's work, possible. For more information about the Holland Fellowship, please see the article by Leo Biga on page 42.

The ban on gathering in person didn't prevent Opera Omaha from *creating* new opera in the last year. We partnered with Tri-Cities Opera on *Miranda*, the world's first live Virtual Reality Opera. We joined Baruch Performing Arts Center in streaming a new digital production of *dwb (driving while black)*. Last January, Opera Omaha became the Midwest online presenter for the internationally acclaimed New York-based PROTOTYPE Festival, sharing *MODULATION*, a compilation of new works by a diverse group of 13 composers. With the leadership of co-curators Melanie Bacaling and Chabrelle Williams (a Holland Community Opera Fellowship alumna), Opera Omaha launched a new series, *Amplifying the Black Experience (A.B.L.E.)*, recognizing that the last year not only brought a global pandemic, but a long overdue racial reckoning triggered by the murders of George Floyd,

James Scurlock, and many others. The A.B.L.E. series, an interactive blend of performance and conversation, will develop further this summer and into the future.

Opera Omaha's efforts to commission, create, and present new work this year were welcomed by our audience and opera artists alike. Artists across the world are still reeling from more than a year of canceled performances and an uncertain future. Opera Omaha became an industry leader in honoring canceled contracts and striving to keep artists employed through the creation of new projects during the pandemic. Our ability to do this was only through the generosity of our ticket holders, donors, corporate sponsors like Omaha Steaks, First National Bank and Valmont, local and national foundations, as well as Opera Omaha's Board of Directors and Advisors. A multitude of artists join me in thanking you for this sustaining support.

With as many of us as possible following health directives to shelter in place, feelings of isolation last year were common. For that reason, Opera Omaha tried to stay *connected* to you, our subscribers, supporters, associates and community. Within one week of closing down our March 2020 ONE Festival, we launched "Virtual Opera Omaha," an online source of new programming to engage individuals of all ages in creative activities. This series by Opera Omaha ran for 10 weeks as the nationwide shutdown extended into the summer of 2020. The success of our online programming and coalition building blossomed into SALON: the Shared Adult Learning Opera Network. This national consortium of opera companies,

spearheaded by Opera Omaha, provides original content for life-long learners on an ongoing basis. Video conferencing technology enabled us to check in on friends and patrons, as well as colleagues across the country and those right here in Omaha. Frequent "Zoom Soirees" with artists and members of Opera Omaha's family of patrons have been true bright spots in such a dark time. While we welcome the return of live performances this spring, we value the new and deeper connections from the past year and plan to further these initiatives to build new alliances and relationships well in to the future.

In the meantime, we can't wait to connect with you in person. I hope to see you at a performance of *Opera Under the Stars*. Maybe our paths will cross in one of the parks, neighborhoods, or other sites for *Opera To Go*, our mobile stage coming to a location near you throughout May and June. We only have a short time to wait for Opera Omaha's return to the Orpheum Theater this fall for a spectacular 2021-2022 season featuring three brand-new "made in Omaha" productions of beloved classics. Whether on-line or in person, Opera Omaha looks forward to *serving*, *creating*, and *connecting* with you for years to come.

In gratitude,



ROGER WEITZ  
GENERAL DIRECTOR





## OUR COMMITMENT TO ANTI-OPPRESSION

In May 2020, our nation faced an overdue awakening to systemic racism. At the time of the demonstrations and protests, Opera Omaha issued a statement that has been included in the signature block of every staff email message: *We will listen more than we will speak, but will not be silent in the face of injustice.*

This is amplified further on our website:

*We join in mourning the murders of James Scurlock, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade and all those whose lives were taken by anti-Black violence and police brutality. We know that each transgression re-injures wounds that have never healed.*

*To our Black community, we know that you are exhausted and recognize we will never fully understand the depth of your suffering. We know that part of your exhaustion comes from the heartbreak of our silence, inaction, and half measures. Please know that we stand ready to support you. We reject systemic racism, brutality, and white supremacy, and we will take your lead on how to use our power as culture-makers to end it.*

*At Opera Omaha, we will listen more than we speak, but will not be silent in the face of injustice.*

Opera Omaha has a long history of engaging singers, directors, production staff, crew and administrative staff of color, led and informed by an increasingly ethnically diverse board. In 2017, our company launched the Holland Community Opera Fellowship informed by a panel of community representatives, moving service to the Omaha community more central to the organization.

However, we know we can and must do better to create equity and inclusion that reflects the greater Omaha community around us. We recognize the impact we make is more critical than our intent.

To that end, Opera Omaha has committed to a number of intentional practices:

- Increased attention to attracting administrative staff of color. Informed by best practices in the opera field and our Holland Community Opera Panel, position postings and applications have been reworded to remove barriers for administrators of color in considering opportunities with Opera Omaha. Since May 2020, people of color have filled all open staffing positions. As new opportunities become available, Opera Omaha is committed to continue to bring staff racial diversity across all levels in-line with Omaha demographics with equitable wages and promotion opportunities.

- Ongoing attention to racial diversification of the Board of Directors. Opera Omaha's Nominating and Governance Committee is committed to recruiting Board prospects that contribute to ongoing diversification of Board membership in race, ethnicity and gender.
- Representation on stage and backstage. Opera Omaha has presented a number of recent productions with multi-racial casts, but we can do better to reflect the demographics of Omaha. In coming concerts and fully-staged productions, audiences will see and hear incredible artists in a variety of roles, up to and including title characters. Specifically, Black singers have been underrepresented on our stages, and Opera Omaha is committed to increasing that representation. In addition, we have a history of engaging gender and racially diverse teams of conductors, stage directors, set/lighting/costume/makeup designers. Informed by performers, we are engaging lighting, hair and makeup designers who design for a spectrum of skin tones.
- Amplifying voices of creators of color. Opera Omaha has presented primarily works composed by white men in its long history, with few exceptions. The shift into a digital platform in response to COVID-19 restrictions has allowed an opportunity to bring a great diversity of voices to our audiences through the productions of *MIRANDA*, *MODULATION* and our recently launched Black-curated *Amplifying the Black Experience* series of performances and conversations. We commit to continuing to bring diverse voices of creators as future projects are devised.
- Building strong relationships with historically oppressed communities. In addition to the organizations we partner with through the Holland Community Fellowship on a daily basis, Opera Omaha is building long-term partnerships to bring awareness of Omaha organizations such as the Great Plains Black History Museum and the Malcolm X Foundation to our audiences in preparation for our co-production of Anthony Davis' opera *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* with Michigan Opera Theater.

Opera Omaha staff and board have begun a two-year diversity and equity capacity building program, funded by the Peter Kiewit Foundation, with people of color, woman, and LGBTQ+ owned firm Team Dynamics, LLC. Through this work, we commit to development of a race and gender focused culture that is representative, inclusive and anti-oppressive.

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# MIRANDA

## A STEAMPUNK VR EXPERIENCE

Music by Kamala Sankaram

Adaptation for VR by Kamala Sankaram and Alison Moritz

Libretto by Kamala Sankaram and Rob Reese

Originally Commissioned, Developed, and Produced at  
HERE through the HERE Artist Residency Program (HARP)

September 24, 25 & 26, 2020

### CREATIVE

**Director** | Alison Moritz

**Conductor & Music Director** | David Bloom

**Composer, Co-librettist** | Kamala Sankaram

**Co-librettist** | Rob Reese

### CAST

**Miranda Wright** | Leela Subramaniam

**Cor Prater** | Trevor Martin

**D.A.V.E.** | Quinn Bernegger

**Anjana Challapattee Wright** | Tahanee Aluwihare

**Izzy Wright** | Timothy Stoddard

Miranda Wright Stand-In | Erin Alcorn

Cor Prater Stand-In | Langelihle Mngxati

Anjana Challapattee Wright Stand-In | Amanda Staub

Presented through a collaboration by Tri-Cities Opera,  
LUMA Projection Arts Festival, Enhance VR and Opera Omaha.



Executive Producer, LUMA Projection Arts Festival | Joshua Bernard

Executive Producer, LUMA Projection Arts Festival | Tice Lerner

Executive Producer, Tri-Cities Opera | John Rozzoni

Associate Producer, Opera Omaha | Kurt Howard

Production Director, LUMA Projection Arts Festival | Anna Warfield

Production Stage Manager, Tri-Cities Opera | Cynthia Hennon Marino

Stage Manager, Tri-Cities Opera | Danielle Ranno

Lead VR Developer, EnhanceVR | Matthew Gill

VR Developer, Visuals Assistant, EnhanceVR | Keith Avery

Sound Designer | Cricket S. Myer

Sound Engineer | Christian Lee

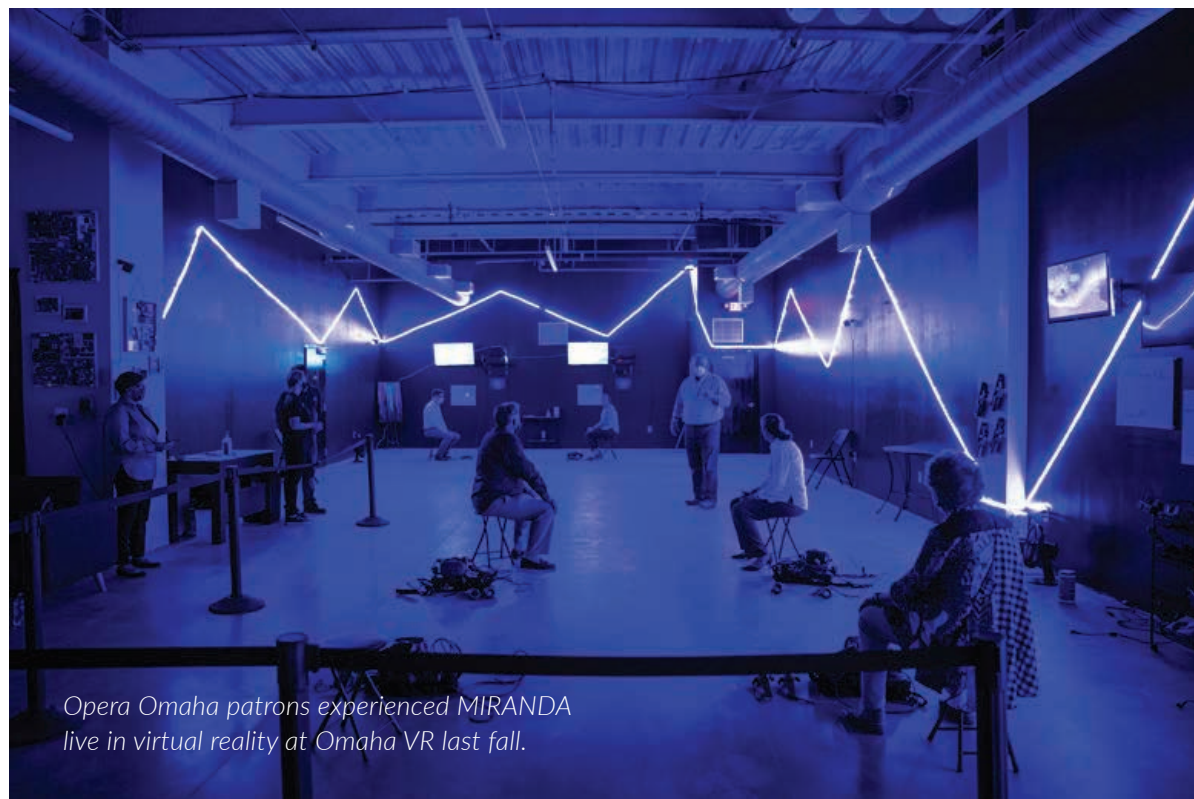
3D Environmental Artist, VFX Artist, Quarantine Interactive Studio | Diego M. Martinez

3D Character Artist, Quarantine Interactive Studio | Juan Caratino

3D Character Artist, Quarantine Interactive Studio | Alvaro Arias

2D Character Artist, Quarantine Interactive Studio | Santiago R. Villa

2D Matte Painter, Quarantine Interactive Studio | Virginia Palomeque



Opera Omaha patrons experienced MIRANDA live in virtual reality at Omaha VR last fall.

## MIRANDA:

### A STEAM PUNK VR EXPERIENCE, LUMA'S BOLD EXPERIMENT

Published September 26, 2020 | Article by Susan Galbraith for dctheatrescene.com

Steam Punk as a style launches viewers into a futuristic universe while it casts a glance backwards nostalgically to a simpler, more elegant world. *Miranda: A Steam Punk VR Experience* creates the alternative-futuristic setting through animation and virtual reality technology to deliver a short opera by Kamala Sankaram, and it's one of the freshest, most inventive pieces to answer our needs in the time of Covid.

Artist Diego M. Martinez has created the tension between "futuristic" and "nostalgic" environments in the first few minutes as the audience "enters" and "walks around" an empty room, wood floors, bulbous steam pipes and strangely shaped windows. He allows time for us to become immersed. The curved bullet-shaped walls are reminiscent of a submarine in Jules Verne's classic science-fiction tale *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Outside this hull one can espy glimpses of dark waters, and our "submarine" passes what remains of a skyscraper civilization, now half-submerged.

As if to charge up the visual dystopia, D.A.V.E., a leather-suited host enters. Part action figure, part circus barker, the computer-generated figure introduces the "game" we are playing in what now looks like a round court chamber, banked by rings of seats with the most curious "audience" that look like rows of nautilus shells. "Ladies and gentlemen," calls out this figure, part ring-leader part judge.

We become part of this audience summoned to hear Case No. 112278. Miranda has been murdered. Three suspects have been rounded up. We have to choose whether we will participate and abide by the rules: we must determine the murderer. It forces our attention.

Sankaram's musical palette is eclectic. Host D.A.V.E. sings in a rock style backed by squealing electric guitars. Sankaram mostly writes for a small classic ensemble of clarinets, saxophones, violins and cellos. For Scene 2, an interior (study), Sankaram uses strings in a tango to re-enact Miranda's search and finding of a mysterious clue that unsettles: 1 in 10 people have died. Soprano Leela Subramanian fulfills the voice of Miranda and throws herself into the difficult score. Sankaram cranks things up further when the three suspects join together in a trio. Technology may have tripped things up here but I found this writing somewhat muddy.

I loved the variety of the depiction of the 3-D characters, realized by Juan Caratino and Alvaro Arias. They conceive Miranda as mostly head in the shots, like an emoji. Cor, the fiancé, dressed in a white suit, leaps about quite a bit and is the hardest to pin down. Is he, as he says, only doing everything for his fiancée or is he the slipperiest of characters?

The Mother is dressed elegantly in a floor-length dress that suggests a sari, a nice nod to Sankaram's cultural origins. Miranda's father is the least developed as a separate figure but does seem most interesting in what he might know and why he might know it.

I'll admit that these generated figures that seem ever to float through the space create at times a somewhat disturbing experience to this non-gamer.

The length of the piece seems both just right for this experiment and, somewhat sadly, fitting the attention span of today's audience taking in virtual art. I certainly wonder if, for as long as we are living with small screen as our single performance medium, two- or three-act classic operas can endure. Coming in at considerably less than one-half hour, Sankaram's work can only introduce themes and musical colors, and most certainly has to jettison complexity and build of characters.

The best dramatically written scene is when Miranda as a ghost confronts Cor. "Isn't there something you want to tell me?" she sings. His reply is more chilling in its paternalism than comforting, "Haven't I always kept you safe? There are things you don't need to worry about." How I wish this scene could have been explored fully.

It does feel as if the courtroom drama is over too soon. But this is what gives it its eerie lingering power: this headlong rush to assume guilt and find a murderer makes us all culpable of participating in what may be a kangaroo court. What other secrets have been bottled up in this world?

As creative artists in theater and opera continue to experiment with how to deliver content and performance experiences, *Miranda: A Steam Punk VR Experience* has boldly set a course that can be explored more and offers rich opportunities of how to reach audience in this new world.



## OPERA TO GO

Delivering snackable opera bites to neighborhoods and community partners,  
Opera To Go debuted with a pop-up concert on September 27, 2020 at Turner Park.  
Each concert featured Head of Music Sean Kelly and local singers including our Holland Community Opera Fellows.  
Concerts will continue through Summer.

These free outdoor concerts feature live performances in multiple locations.  
No fees, no fuss and no tickets required.

### FALL 2020 CONCERTS

Turner Park | September 27, 2020  
Featuring Holland Community Opera Fellows  
Gotta Be Me | October 10, 2020  
Featuring Holland Community Opera Fellows  
Lincoln, NE | October 11, 2020  
Hosted by Tony Goins and Capital Cigar Lounge

### SPRING AND SUMMER 2021 CONCERTS

Elmwood Park  
Saturday, May 8 | 1pm  
Lake Zorinsky  
Saturday, May 15 | 1pm  
Countryside Village Shopping Center  
Saturday, May 22 | 3:30pm  
Papillion Farmers' Market  
Wednesday, June 2 | 6pm  
Tom Hanafan River's Edge Park, Council Bluffs  
Saturday, June 5 | 1pm  
Highlander Community Lawn  
Saturday, June 12 | 1pm  
Brown Park  
Wednesday, June 26 | 1pm

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## SINGERS

Karina Brazas

Mary Carrick

Ryan Daly

Nicholas Davis

Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor

Jared Hiscock

Michelle Sarkesian

Matthew Sommer

Sara Warner

Fernando Antonio Montejano, Emcee

## PRODUCTION STAFF

Director of Production | Katherine Clanton

Head of Music | Sean Kelly

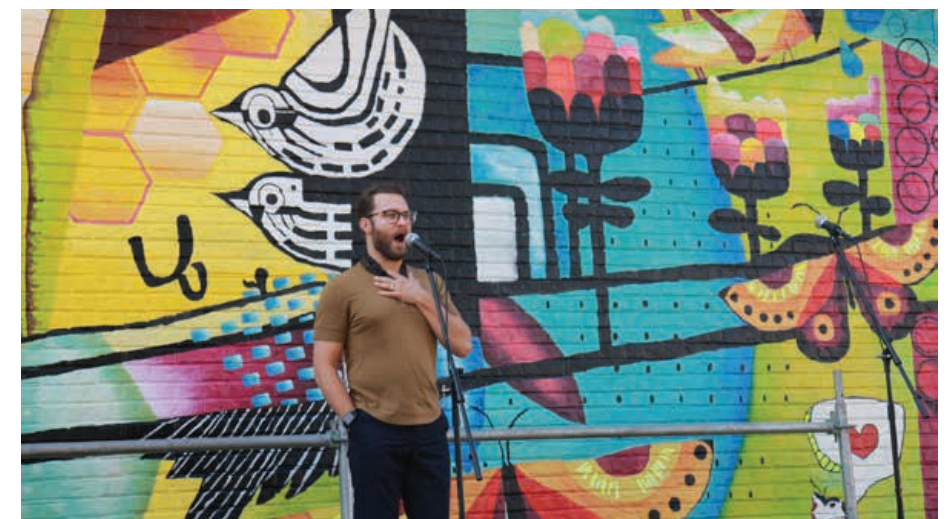
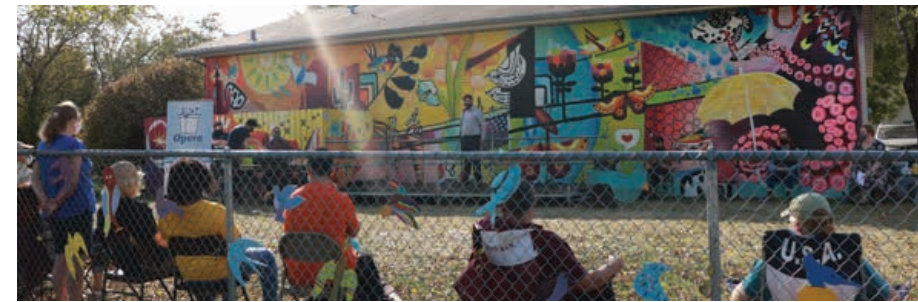
Stage Manager | Angela Turner

Assistant Technical Director | Michael McElroy

Technical Supervisor | Chad Curran

Technical Director | Mark Blice

From left to right, top to bottom: Gotta Be Me concert; Turner Park at Midtown Crossing; Katherine Clanton, Sean Kelly and Nicholas Davis; Gotta Be Me audience; Turner Park at Midtown Crossing; Katherine Clanton, Sean Kelly and Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor; Turner Park at Midtown Crossing audience; Jared Hiscock performing for Gotta Be Me.





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# A.B.L.E.

## AMPLIFYING THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

### A.B.L.E.

Amplifying the Black Experience

In solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, Opera Omaha curators Melanie Bacaling and Chabrelle Williams introduced a new series, A.B.L.E. (Amplifying the Black Experience) in 2020. The series seeks to honor, celebrate, and bring awareness to the multifaceted stories of the Black community.

A.B.L.E. launched last October with the digital premiere of *dwb (driving while black)*, co-presented by Opera Omaha and Baruch Performing Arts. The screening was enhanced with a community panel discussion, "Black American Truths," facilitated by Chabrelle Williams. The series continued with new digital offerings in the new year, including the premiere of the music video "Hold Fast to Dreams" in partnership with You Go Girl, and "Joy as a Form of Resistance", featuring soprano Lauren Michelle.

**Co-Curator and Line Producer** | Melanie Bacaling **Co-Curator** | Chabrelle Williams

#### "BLACK AMERICAN TRUTHS" PANEL MEMBERS

**Moderator** | Chabrelle Williams

Bobby Brumfield, Founding member of Men Against Domestic Violence Action Coalition and Board Member of Inclusive Communities

Dillard W. Delts, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Association

Rachel D. Fox, You Go Girl

Amariyon Green, Community Advocate, High School Senior, and President of the Black Student Alliance at Creighton Preparatory School

Nancy Williams, Co-Founder and CEO of No More Empty Pots

**ASL signer** | Dr. Julie Delkamiller

#### **DWB (DRIVING WHILE BLACK)**

Presented with Baruch Performing Arts Center

**Librettist/Soprano** | Roberta Gumbel

**Composer** | Susan Kander

**Director** | Chip Miller

**New Morse Code** (Accompaniment)

**Cello** | Hannah Collins

**Percussion** | Michael Compitello

#### **HOLD FAST TO DREAMS**

**Soprano** | Chabrelle Williams

**Pianist** | Grant Loehnig

**Video Editor** | Jack Edinger

**Video Director & Producer** | Melanie Bacaling

#### **Featuring members of You Go Girl**

You Go Girl Omaha is an Omaha non-profit committed to encouraging, empowering and inspiring girls and young women. Our mission is to end the cycle of self-doubt and low self-esteem by creating unique experiences that amplify our founding pillars: self-love, self-awareness, wellness, education, and leadership.

Stay tuned for more details on our next installment.

#### **JOY AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE**

**Soprano** | Lauren Michelle

Made possible with support from



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# MODULATION

A digital, self-guided exploration of these distanced times created by thirteen of the most provocative and diverse voices in the contemporary music idiom; MODULATION leads you through the themes of ISOLATION, IDENTITY, and FEAR, with the connection of BREATH.

January 8 – February 28, 2021

## COMPOSERS

JoJo Abot  
Sahba Aminikia  
Juhi Bansal  
Raven Chacon  
Carmina Escobar  
Yvette Janine Jackson  
Molly Joyce  
Jimmy López Bellido  
Angélica Negrón  
Paul Pinto  
Daniel Bernard Roumain  
Joel Thompson  
Bora Yoon

MODULATION is PRODUCED, COMMISSIONED, AND DEVELOPED by PROTOTYPE  
Co-Presented in a digital presentation with PROTOTYPE, Opera Omaha,  
Carolina Performing Arts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and LA Opera.  
SITE AND CONCEPT DESIGN by Imaginary Places



**"BREATH"**  
COMPOSED by Carmina Escobar

**"ASTRAL GOLD"**  
PERFORMED by Carmina Escobar  
SOUND ENGINEER Justin Asher

**"FEAR"**  
COMPOSED by Yvette Janine Jackson, Molly Joyce, and Joel Thompson

**"FEAR IS THEIR ALIBI"**  
COMPOSED by Yvette Janine Jackson  
POETRY by Jarita Davis  
PERFORMED by Malesha Jessie Taylor, Clifton Joey Guidry  
INSTRUMENTALS by Clifton Joey Guidry, III  
ANIMATION by Zekkereya El-magharbel

**"OUT OF A THOUGHT"**  
COMPOSED AND PERFORMED by Molly Joyce  
WRITTEN by Marco Grosse  
DIRECTED by Austin Regan  
VIDEO PRODUCTION by Four/Ten Media  
AUDIO ENGINEER Michael Hammond

**"CLAIRVOYANCE"**  
COMPOSED by Joel Thompson  
LIBRETTO by Samiya Bashir  
VIDEO DESIGN by Camilla Tassi  
VOCALISTS Rhianna Cockrell, Deborah Stephens, Andréa Walker  
ACTORS Alexandra Maurice, Maal West  
CONDUCTED by Maura Tuffy  
AUDIO ENGINEER Chris Talbot

**"IDENTITY"**  
COMPOSED by JoJo Abot, Juhi Bansal, Paul Pinto and Angélica Negrón

**"THE DIVINE I AM"**  
PRODUCED, PERFORMED, AND COMPOSED by JoJo Abot  
FEATURING Esperanza Spalding  
VIDEO DIRECTED, EDITED, AND PRODUCED by JoJo Abot

**"WAVES OF CHANGE"**  
COMPOSED AND ENGLISH TEXT by Juhi Bansal  
GUEST ARTIST AND BENGALI VOCALS by Ranjana Ghatak  
PERFORMED by Kathryn Shuman and Timothy Loo  
SOUND DESIGN, MIXING, AND MASTERING by Laura M. Kramer  
CINEMATOGRAPHY AND EDITING by Miguel Galindo  
BENGALI TEXT by Ranjan Bandhopadhyay, Sunit Ghatak, Indira Ghatak

**"OTRA COSA"**  
COMPOSED by Angélica Negrón  
LIBRETTO, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND ANIMATION by Mariela Pabón  
PERFORMED by Lido Pimienta, Patti Kilroy  
INSTRUMENTALS by Patti Kilroy  
ANIMATION by Juan Roberto  
SOUND ENGINEER Alessandra Roubini

**"WHITENESS: BLANC"**  
CREATED AND PERFORMED by Paul Pinto  
DIRECTED by Kameron Neal  
CINEMATOGRAPHY by Jon Burklund/Zanni Productions  
SOUND DESIGN by Philip White

**"ISOLATION"**  
COMPOSED by Sahba Aminikia, Raven Chacon, Jimmy López, Daniel Bernard Roumain, and Bora Yoon

**"AYENE [MIRROR]"**  
MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN by Sahba Aminikia  
LYRICS AND VOCALS by Mina Momeni  
INSTRUMENTALS by David Coulter  
VIDEO by Arya Ghavamian

**"LA INDITA CAUTIVA"**  
COMPOSED, CONCEIVED, AND DIRECTED by Raven Chacon  
LYRICS AND VOCALS by Nacha Mendez  
GUITAR AND DRUM by Raven Chacon  
VIOLIN by Heather Trost  
ACTORS Paloma Gallup Rodriguez, Nacha Mendez  
CAMERA AND LIGHTING by Raven Chacon and D.E. Hyde  
EDITED by Raven Chacon  
AUDIO RECORDED by Jeremy Barnes, Nacha Mendez, Raven Chacon  
MASTERED by John Dieterich

**"WHERE ONCE WE SANG"**  
COMPOSED by Jimmy López Bellido  
LYRICS by Mark Campbell  
DIRECTED by Kevin Newbury  
PERFORMED by Sasha Cooke, Kirill Kuzmin  
RECORDED by Brad Sayles  
VIDEO CONCEIVED by Brandon Kazen-Maddox, Kevin Newbury, Marcus Shields, and Jecca Barry  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY & EDITING by Marcus Shields  
PRODUCTION DESIGN by Bushwick Public Street Artists

**"I HAVE NOTHING TO DO EXCEPT LOVE"**  
COMPOSED by Daniel Bernard Roumain  
LIBRETTO, VOCALS, AND PIANO by Minna Choi  
DIRECTED, EDITED, AND LIBRETTO by Dana Greenfield  
WITH WORDS by Simone Roumain  
CINEMATOGRAPHY by Sam Woolf  
DANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY by Sarah Bolander  
COSTUME CONSULTANT Matsy Stinson  
PROJECT MANAGEMENT by Sozo Artists

**"THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME"**  
CONCEIVED AND PERFORMED by Bora Yoon  
DIRECTED by Brock Labrenz  
MUSIC by Henry Purcell ('Gaia's Lament' based on 'Dido's Lament' from *Dido and Aeneas*), Bora Yoon, and solo shamanic drumming in 'Throwdown' by Sandra Ingerman, Sounds True, Inc. Used with permission.  
ADDITIONAL LYRICS by Bora Yoon, Emily Dickinson from poem 'Forever – is composed of Nows'  
CINEMATOGRAPHY by Brock Labrenz, Bora Yoon, Allison Spann  
AUDIO MIXED by R. Luke DuBois at Ozone G Studios  
WITH QUOTES by Greta Thunberg, George Floyd, Autumn Peltier, Breanna Fruean, and Xiuhtezcatl of Earth Guardians

# MODULATION

## NEW YORK CITY, PROTOTYPE FESTIVAL

Published January 01, 2021 | Article by Joshua Rosenblum for operanews.com

THE FEARLESS DIRECTORS of New York’s reliably edgy Prototype Festival weren’t about to let a mere pandemic stand in their way. Instead, for the opening presentation of this year’s annual mid-winter series, they commissioned thirteen composers (and nearly one hundred affiliated collaborators) to create short works centered around their personal responses to 2020. The result was MODULATION, a “digitally native, user-led adventure” that was startlingly imaginative and frequently quite moving.

MODULATION, which debuted on January 8 and was available for streaming on demand through the 16, divides its video components into three categories of response: Fear, Isolation, and Identity. The online viewer, greeted with a magenta-tinted mountain landscape and three glowing doors, is invited to navigate the categories and the individual videos contained within—each between four and six minutes in length—in any order. I started with “Fear.”

In this category, Joel Thompson’s “Clairvoyance” is a standout. It features imaginative three-part vocal harmony, splendidly rendered by Rhianna Cockrell, Deborah Stephens, and Andréa Walker. “I am trying to breathe, but I freeze,” they sing. Samiya Bashir’s libretto is grippingly relevant, calling to mind both the coronavirus and George Floyd’s death by asphyxiation. However, the text keeps coming back to the word “love,” and the piece ends on a note of decided optimism. In purely musical terms, this is the most strikingly beautiful entry of the whole collection.

Yvette Janine Jackson’s “Fear is Their Alibi” evolved when poet Jarita Davis heard a man describe his work training law enforcement officers how to develop alibis to avoid prosecution after the shooting of unarmed Black men. The piece starts with solo bassoon, and a small Rorschach-type black squiggle that slowly expands outward. “That fear is a fraud, their fear is a weapon,” sings Malesha Jessie Taylor, with her soulfully inflected soprano. As the drawing continues to morph vividly, Clifton Joey Guidry, III’s bassoon spews out blistering, late Coltrane-style licks.

The most consistently compelling category turns out to be Identity. Composer Angélica Négron and librettist Mariela Pabón’s “Otra Cosa” features deliberately primitive, hand-drawn animation and exchanges wherein Americans repeatedly get the pronunciation of Spanish names wrong. (“Mariela.” “Maniana?” “Mariela.” “Mariah?”) The alienation, conveyed over a pulsing synth beat, is palpable. “When they call you intense, speak even louder,” urge the Spanish lyrics.

Paul Pinto’s wild “Whiteness: Blanc” begins with this exchange: “Where are you from?” “Um, Queens.” “No, where

are you really from?” “I can’t be from Queens?” His image is periodically obliterated by a white screen with large black letters and loud voices (“Watch out!”). Pinto continues to deconstruct the identity question, often at a dazzlingly rapid pace, with surreal, stream-of-consciousness bursts in close harmony. Toward the end, about a hundred iterations of Pinto’s face zip into the screen, forming a chorus of dancing heads which launch into an extended riff on the surprisingly numerous ways he has self-identified racially over the years. It’s really too good.

Juhi Bansal’s beautiful “Waves of Change” is inspired by the true story of a group of poor Bangladeshi girls, most forced to work from early girlhood and to get married in their early teens, who have found liberation through the Bangladesh Girls Surf Club. It features overlapping vocals in both English and Bengali, with virtuoso cello accompaniment by Timothy Loo. The inspiring visuals include footage of ocean, waves, and beachfront. “I dream of choices,” sings soprano Kathryn Shuman, whose vocalizations peak on a high D. The piece ends with an exhilarating overhead shot of a lone surfer.

One-woman sensation Jojo Abot wrote, produced, composed, directed, edited, and stars in “The Divine I Am” (although there is a memorable cameo from singer/bassist Esperanza Spalding). Abot cuts a striking figure against a desert backdrop, her lithe form wrapped sparingly in colored ribbons and capped with an elaborate headdress. She dances sinuously with a folding fan to the sound of her own layered, wailing (but harmonious) vocals. Other striking imagery includes a small red cross with bulls-eye rings drawn around it in the dirt, and Abot crouched down, creating patterns of symbols in the sand with coffee grinds. It’s ambiguous but compelling.

In the Isolation category, Daniel Bernard Roumain’s lyrical, haunting “I Have Nothing to Do Except Love” was inspired by his mother’s dementia. A woman performs a graceful solo dance—in a room, in the street, alongside a clothesline—to the sound of a gentle, poignant ballad, sensitively rendered (both vocals and piano) by Minna Choi. “I cry into the night/I can hear them in my heart/In another world we live together,” Choi sings, as she observes the balletic, liberated movements of her silent counterpart, the elegant dancer Sarah Bolander.

Regrettably, space limitations prevent me from describing every entry, but there’s not a weak link in the bunch. Each personal, gem-like piece merits one’s full attention, and collectively they constitute a landmark achievement in the burgeoning contemporary genre of digital opera/music-theater.

# Bizet, Mahler, & Chausson



## BIZET, MAHLER AND CHAUSSON

Collaboration with Opera Omaha presented by Omaha Symphony

Two voices melded with the orchestra for a night of opera favorites with iconic works by Mozart and Bizet, coupled with song cycles by Mahler and Chausson - this collaboration was for opera and symphony lovers alike.

April 23 & 24, 2021

### CREATIVE

**Conductor** | Conner Gray Covington

**Soprano** | Karen Slack

**Baritone** | Craig Irvin

### PROGRAM

**MOZART:** Overture to *Così fan tutte*

**CHAUSSON:** *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*

**MAHLER:** *Songs of a Wayfarer (Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen)*

**BIZET:** Selections from *Carmen* Suites 1 and 2



### CRAIG IRVIN

Baritone Craig Irvin last appeared with Opera Omaha as Valentin in *Faust*. Most recently he appeared with the Minnesota Opera as Orest in *Elektra*, and reprised his role of Lt. Horstmayer in *Silent Night* with Utah Opera, a role he created for the World Premiere at Minnesota Opera and has since sung with Austin Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Fort Worth Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, and Atlanta Opera. Additional opera highlights include Dominik in *Arabella* with Canadian Opera Company, Stubb in *Moby Dick*, Count Almaviva in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and Zurga in *Les pêcheurs de perles* with Utah Opera, Dandini in *La Cenerentola* with Opera Orlando, Frank in *Die Fledermaus* with Des Moines Metro Opera, Dan Packard in *Dinner at Eight* with the Wexford Festival and Minnesota Opera, and his role debut as *Macbeth* with LoftOpera in New York City. Concert appearances include Rachmaninoff's *The Bells* with the Portland Symphony, Handel's *Messiah* with the Jacksonville Symphony, Britten's *War Requiem* with Music Worcester, and Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the Phoenix Symphony.

### KAREN SLACK

American soprano Karen Slack has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera where she made her debut in the title role of Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, and San Francisco Opera. Ms. Slack's 2019-2020 season included a return to The Metropolitan Opera as Serena in *Porgy and Bess*, a recital with Opera Philadelphia, and guest soloist for Madison Opera's virtual Opera in the Park. The 2020 - 2021 season brought digital performances with Opera Philadelphia, Houston Grand Opera, Madison Opera, Minnesota Opera, and *driving while black* with Urban Arias. Additional highlights include Alice Ford in *Falstaff*, Leonora in *Il trovatore* and *Tosca* with Arizona Opera, *Aïda* at Austin Opera, Emelda Griffith in *Champion* with New Orleans Opera, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with Nashville Opera, Sister Rose in *Dead Man Walking* with Minnesota Opera and Vancouver Opera, and her Scottish Opera debut as Anna in Puccini's *Le villi*. Ms. Slack portrayed a featured role in Tyler Perry's movie and soundtrack "For Colored Girls" and serves as Artistic Advisor for Portland Opera, Co-Director for the 2020-21 Opera Program at the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts, and Co-Chair of the Women's Opera Network with OPERA America.





# Opera UNDER THE Stars

## OPERA UNDER THE STARS

Opera Omaha returns to the stage this May in a new dazzling outdoor concert, *Opera Under the Stars*, featuring beloved opera classics performed by some of opera's favorite stars at the new Holland Center Outdoors.

May 28 & 29, 2021

### CREATIVE

**Conductor** | Steven White

**Stage Director** | Dean Anthony

**Lighting Designer** | John Hansen

**Wig & Makeup Designer** | Ronell Oliveri

### SOLOISTS

Michael Adams\*

Barry Banks\*

Kristen Choi

Mary Femeinear

Lauren Michelle\*

Featuring musicians from **Omaha Symphony**

Production Sponsors:

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\*Opera Omaha Debut



## MICHAEL ADAMS

Baritone Michael Adams makes his Opera Omaha debut in *Opera Under the Stars*. Mr. Adams' 2020-21 season included returns to Seattle Opera as Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore*, the Grand Théâtre de Genève as Maximilan in *Candide*, and the Count in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Madison Opera. Last season, he debuted *Eugene Onegin* (Seattle Opera), Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* (Washington National Opera), and Edwin Cheney in *Shining Brow* (Arizona Opera). The following engagements were postponed or cancelled due to COVID-19: Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Utah Opera), Kuligin in *Kát'a Kabanová* (Metropolitan Opera debut), *Don Giovanni* (Glimmerglass Festival), Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* (Fort Worth Symphony), and Orff's *Carmina Burana* (New Choral Society).

Other recent engagements include Zurga in *Les pêcheurs de perles* (Grand Teatre del Liceu); Melisso in *Alcina*, Marcello in *La bohème*, Masetto in *Don Giovanni* (Grand Théâtre de Genève); Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* (Seattle Opera); Gaylord Ravenal in *Showboat* (Glimmerglass Festival); Silvio in *Pagliacci*, Marcello in *La bohème* (Utah Opera); Ping in *Turandot*, Harašta in *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Deutsche Oper Berlin); and Lescaut in *Manon*, Ping in *Turandot* (Des Moines Metro Opera). At Washington National Opera, he sang Lieutenant Audebert in *Silent Night*, Pilot in *The Little Prince*, Melisso in *Alcina*, and *Don Giovanni*.

## DEAN ANTHONY

Dean Anthony makes his Opera Omaha directorial debut with *Opera Under the Stars*. In addition to directing, Mr. Anthony also has had numerous roles as a performer, educator, and producer. Mr. Anthony's 2019-2020 season included *Cavalleria Rusticana* with Knoxville Opera, *Glory Denied* with Union Avenue Opera, *Die Fledermaus* with Amarillo Opera, *Man of La Mancha* with Shreveport Opera, *Carmen* with Opera Tampa, *Tales of Hoffmann* and *Speed Dating Tonight!* with Opera Delaware, *Barber of Seville* with Opera on the James, *La Rondine* with Peabody Opera Theater, and *Carmen* and *Man of La Mancha* at the Brevard Music Center. A major producer and promoter of new opera works, Mr. Anthony has helped facilitate the development of numerous projects including Tom Cipullo's *Glory Denied* and Mayo, J. Mark Searce's *Falling Angel*, a workshop of Robert Aldridge's *Sister Carrie*, and *Change the World, It Needs It!* a new cabaret with the Kurt Weill Foundation. As a character tenor, Mr. Anthony performed over 100 roles on the operatic stage and garnered acclaim for his keen vocal, dramatic, physical, and acrobatic abilities. Mr. Anthony is currently the Director of Opera with the Janiec Opera Company of the Brevard Music Center and has served on the faculty since 2008.



## BARRY BANKS

Tenor Barry Banks makes his Opera Omaha debut in *Opera Under the Stars* and will return next season for *Sweeney Todd*. Mr. Banks' performances of the leading bel canto roles by Bellini, Rossini and Donizetti have taken him to the world's leading opera houses including The Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Gran Teatre del Liceu and the Salzburg Festival. He will make his debut at the 2021 Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro in a revival of *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra*. Notable operatic roles have included Banks' debut as Arnold (*Guillaume Tell*) at Welsh National Opera, the title role in *Mitridate, re di Ponto* and Don Narciso (*Il*

*turco in Italia*) at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*) at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Idreno (*Semiramide*) at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples and Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*) at the Metropolitan Opera. He has appeared as Iago in Rossini's *Otello* at both Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Salzburg Festival. The role of Don Ramiro (*La cenerentola*) saw his debut at the Gran Teatre del Liceu, and Oreste (*Ermione*) marked his debut at the Santa Fe Festival. In concert Barry Banks has performed Berlioz' *Grand Messe des Morts* under Sir Colin Davis and the London Symphony Orchestra.



## KRISTEN CHOI

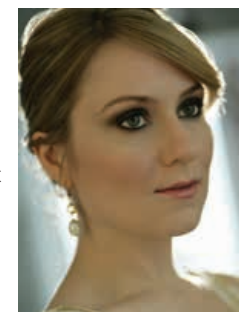
Mezzo-soprano Kristen Choi returns to Opera Omaha after her debut as Suzuki, her signature role, in the 2019 production of *Madama Butterfly*. Her 2019-2020 bookings included another house debut in this signature role at Opera Philadelphia (COVID postponed until spring 2022) and her company debut at Piedmont Opera reprising the role of Lady Thiang in *The King and I*. Recent engagements included a role and house debut with Opera Maine as the Third Lady in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, as well as creating the title role in a brand new production of *Murasaki's Moon*, a new work in partnership with Onsite Opera and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the 2021-2022 season, Ms. Choi will make her Michigan Opera Theater and Dallas Opera debuts, reprising Suzuki.

Additional highlights include a tour with the Lincoln Center Broadway Production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*, consecutive Suzukis with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City and Virginia Opera, and a role debut as Hiroko Kobayashi in Jack Perla's *An American Dream*.

## MARY FEMINEAR

Soprano Mary Feminear returns to Opera Omaha after last appearing in *Ariodante* and *The Wreck* during the inaugural ONE Festival in 2018. During the 19/20 season, Ms. Feminear was scheduled to sing Damigella, Pallade, and Venere in *The Coronation of Poppea* with Opera Delaware, the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with Maryland Lyric Opera, and in Beethoven's *Mass in C Major* with Grant Park Music Festival. In the 2018-19 season, she sang Micaëla in *Carmen* with the Grand Théâtre de Genève and Donna Elvira and Susanna in concert with Maryland Lyric Opera. During the 17/18 season, she sang Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* in Geneva and Amore in Cavalli's *Il Giasone* at the Château de Versailles.

As a member of the Troupe des Jeunes Solistes in Geneva, roles included Musetta in *La Bohème*, Amore in *Il Giasone*, Mimi in the *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, Nanetta in Verdi's *Falstaff*, and Helena in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Other credits include the title role in Handel's *Semele* at Opera Omaha and Seattle Opera, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* with Pacific MusicWorks, and Polissena in Handel's *Radamisto* at Juilliard.



## LAUREN MICHELLE

Soprano Lauren Michelle makes her Opera Omaha debut in *Opera Under the Stars* and returns next season for *Eugene Onegin*. Highlights from recent seasons include Natasha in *War and Peace* and Jessica in *Merchant of Venice* at the Welsh National Opera, Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Palm Beach Opera, Musetta in *La Bohème* with Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Dorset Opera, Irina in Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars* with the Washington National Opera and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Fourth Maid in *Elektra* at the Vienna State Opera and in concert with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. On the concert stage, she has appeared with the Berlin Philharmonic under Marc Minkowski in Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in Poulenc's *Gloria*, with members of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg in Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and Kurt Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins*, at Carnegie Hall in Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and with the Fairfield Chorale in Handel's *Messiah*. Ms. Michelle has been a prizewinner of more than fifteen competitions, including the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, the Francisco Viñas Competition, the George London Foundation Vocal Competition, and the Santa Gianna Beretta International Competition, Milan Italy.

## STEVEN WHITE

Maestro Steven White returns to Opera Omaha after most recently conducting the 2018 production of *Faust*. Original engagements during Maestro White's COVID-19 shortened 2019-2020 season were *La traviata* with Utah Opera, *Pagliacci* with Greensboro Opera, *La clemenza di Tito* with the A.J. Fletcher Institute, *Ariadne au Naxos* with Arizona Opera, and a Masterworks Concert with the Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra. Other recent engagements include *Otello* with Austin Opera, *Rigoletto* with San Diego Opera, *Tosca* with Arizona Opera, *Romeo et Juliette* with Opera Birmingham, and a return to the Metropolitan Opera to participate in their productions of *The Merry Widow* and *Le nozze di Figaro*. As former Artistic Director of Opera Roanoke, Maestro White conducted nearly all of that company's productions from 1999 through 2010, including performances of *Das Lied von der Erde*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Fidelio*, *Falstaff*, *Otello*, *Macbeth*, *Aida*, *Hänsel und Gretel* and many others. He has also served as Principal Conductor for Opera Birmingham and as Associate Conductor and Chorus Master for Florida Grand Opera. In May 2013 Maestro White received an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Roanoke College.







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## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Opera Omaha's Community Programs offer a wide variety of opportunities that go beyond the main stage productions. Each year, our engagement programs reach thousands of individuals across the metropolitan area. Whether diving deeper into the opera, opening a door to view opera from a new perspective, or introducing opera to new audiences, our engagement programs strive to make opera accessible to everyone.

### OPERA OMAHA COMMUNITY PROGRAMS BY THE NUMBERS

AUGUST 2020-APRIL 2021

# 101

EVENTS



# 124

HOURS DIGITAL PROGRAMMING



# 4,015

PEOPLE REACHED



# 30

PIECES RECORDED FOR  
HEALING ARTS



# 8,862

SOCIAL MEDIA  
ENGAGEMENT



# 30,000

SOCIAL MEDIA  
VIRAL IMPRESSIONS



NUMBERS AS OF APRIL 30, 2021





## HOLLAND COMMUNITY OPERA FELLOWSHIP

The Holland Community Opera Fellowship is the centerpiece of Opera Omaha's strategic vision for the future. The Holland Community Opera Fellowship (HCOF) is transformational, and as a result supports the creation of an inventive, creative, empathetic, and inclusive community that inspires joy, self-discovery, kinder discourse, and opportunity for all.

Launched in 2017, HCOF leads the opera field in civic practice - building deep relationships outside of the performance venues. These relationships and the programs co-created with our partners have proven to be our strengths in these unprecedented times. In today's world, the arts play a pivotal role in shaping our communities and the quality of life of our citizens. In service to the community, we are bringing opera into new environments, illustrating and promoting the value of creativity in both the arts and non-arts sectors.

The HCOF panel represents a cross-section of the community including organizations, businesses, neighborhoods, and community groups. Those serving on the panel develop a partnership with Opera Omaha to engage in meaningful conversations around community issues, program development, potential partners and opportunities across different neighborhoods and sectors. The panel considers high level strategic decisions and priorities, helping set the direction of the Fellowship and is a critical part of the Fellow selection process. With the panel, residents from neighborhoods across the greater Omaha metro area have a voice in choosing who and how artists interact with their diverse districts and constituent groups.

HCOF works collaboratively with community partners to co-create programming that helps individuals, organizations, and communities reach their goals. We know we can't solve the most pressing issues in our community, like homelessness, income disparity, immigration, or segregation, but by working with partners who are the experts working in those areas we can bring our unique artistic resources to the table to help meet their goals together.

While we haven't been able to offer in-person programming since March 2020, we have adapted to new methods of program delivery to meet partner needs and found for some of our partners and programming there are real opportunities and advantages. Some of these projects include virtual music masterclasses with individuals from Ollie Webb Center, hybrid creativity workshops for residents at MICAH House, St. Joseph Tower, and QLI, Healing Arts recordings for UNMC Patient TV, and a take-home artistic prompt for seniors at Intercultural Senior Center, just to name a few.

### HCOF COMMUNITY PANEL

Cam Bexten, NU Foundation

Colleen Heavican Cass, UNMC/Nebraska Medicine Healing Arts

Rachel Morgan, Nebraska Arts Council

Rita Paskowitz, Storyteller

Alysia Radicia, RDG Design

Paula Wallace, Artist/Hot Shops

Cammy Watkins, Inclusive Communities

Roberta Wilhelm, Girls, Inc.

Gwyn Williams, Independent Leadership Coach

Nancy Williams, No More Empty Pots

The Holland Community Opera Fellowship is generously supported by:

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**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT OF THE ARTS** The Hearst Foundation

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### NICHOLAS DAVIS

First-year Holland Community Opera Fellow Baritone Nicholas Davis is a versatile artist equally at home on the operatic, theater, and concert stages. Acknowledged for his “rolling mellifluous baritone” (Opera Today), Nicholas has enjoyed engagements with companies such as: The Santa Fe Opera, Seattle Opera, Minnesota Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival, Chicago Opera Theater, Chicago Sinfonietta, and Theater Latté Da to name a few.

In addition to his performing experience, Mr. Davis has had the honor to work in the Detroit Metro school system with the Motor City Lyric Opera anti-bullying campaign, teach vocal workshops with the Our Own Thing Chorale youth program, and serve as Peer Counselor for the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, and Dance Minority Student Office.



### JARED HISCOCK

Baritone Jared Hiscock is a second-year Holland Community Opera Fellow. In December 2020, he completed his D.M.A. in vocal performance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. During the 2019 summer season Jared performed Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* with Opera Orvieto in Città della Pieve, Italy, and Marquis de la Force in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* with Saltworks Opera in Cape Charles, VA. Jared spent two seasons doing educational outreach with the professional opera touring company Opera for the Young, performing Power House in the world premiere of *Super Storm!* and the Sea-King in *Rusalka*. Recent engagements include performances of Dr. Malatesta in *Don Pasquale*, Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, William Jennings Bryan in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Friedrich Bhaer in *Little Women*, Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Melchior in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* all with UNL Opera; Leporello in *Don Giovanni* as a guest artist with the University of Kansas; and as the baritone soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Vaughan Williams's *Five Mystical Songs*, and Adams's *The Wound-Dresser*.

### GWENNA FAIRCHILD-TAYLOR

Canadian soprano Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor holds an M.M. in Opera (University of Toronto) and a B.M. in Voice Performance (Western University) and is a second-year Holland Community Opera Fellow. This past season, Gwenna was a recipient of an Encouragement Award at the Nebraska District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Recent performance highlights include originating the role of Nature in *Cries of the Earth* (Artsong Collaborative Project), Berta in *The Barber of Seville* (Indian River Festival, Stratford Summer Music), Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* (Toronto Lyric Opera Centre / Toronto Mozart Players), and Soprano Soloist in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* (London Symphonia). Ms. Fairchild-Taylor has spent time as a Musician In Residence at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, and is a four-time recipient of Government of Nunavut Culture & Heritage Grants in support of her music and drama programs in communities in the Arctic. She also wrote the curriculum and continues to consult for “Learn English Through Song,” a program in Toronto that facilitates language learning and community building for newcomer women through singing. She has worked as a teaching artist and consulted on curriculum development for education programming at the Canadian Opera Company.



### FERNANDO ANTONIO MONTEJANO

Fernando Antonio Montejano is a first-year Holland Community Opera Fellow. As a local Omaha writer, Fernando has used his voice through various works, whether for the page or stage, to bring awareness to the many struggles of those dealing with mental illness and disability in all shapes and forms. He is especially focused on the way mental illness is communicated and addressed in Hispanic and Latinx communities.

Fernando has been invited to perform his work by organizations such as NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) and The Boys and Girls Clubs of the Midlands, and to read alongside Nebraska State Poet Matt Mason. For the last decade, Fernando has had the honor of being a Teaching Artist for the Nebraska Writers Collective, instructing poetry and writing in schools throughout Nebraska and leading writing workshops in Omaha with community members of all ages. Additionally, he has performed at numerous Omaha events including Random Acts of Poetry, Writers Resist: Omaha, The Joslyn Art Museum's “Framing The Flame”, and The Metro Area Teen Health Summit held at Creighton University.



# MAKING COMMUNITY WHERE IT COUNTS

## HOLLAND FELLOWS BRING OPERA OMAHA ENGAGEMENT TO A NEW LEVEL THROUGH DEDICATED CIVIC PRACTICE

by Leo Adam Biga

In this woke era, organizations are called to be mindful about engaging all different sectors of their communities. Matters of identity are more problematic for some entities than others. In the performing arts world, mainline presenting and producing groups have historically done a poor job of representation. In particular, Opera has operated in a bubble of exclusion and privilege. In its traditional surface outreach, opera has dictated the terms of engagement, rather than letting the community lead. Even with heightened awareness and appreciation around equity, opera companies have been slow to make deeper, more authentic community connections and embrace inclusive spaces. An exception to this rule is Opera Omaha, which has adopted dedicated civic practice into the fabric of its mission. The cornerstone of this focused engagement is the Holland Community Opera Fellowship, whose cohort of civic-minded Fellows serve the expressed needs of diverse partner organizations, most of whom operate in the human services arena.

The artists who work as Fellows – singers, writers, educators – are the community ambassadors for Opera Omaha’s strategic vision moving forward. It’s a simple yet profound belief that opera and the arts add value to a community’s quality of life in direct proportion to the intentional engagement they make. Through the program, which launched in 2017, Opera Omaha offers Fellows as resources to meet specific partner needs geared to the clients they serve. In the exchanges

that follow, Opera Omaha staff actively listen to what partners need or hope to achieve. Then, together, Fellows and partners co-create interactive programming that aims to uplift and inspire. Personal creative expression flowers, barriers and stereotypes fall away, and participants are empowered to be the best version of themselves they can be. Relationships are made that transform the lives of individuals and organizations. It is about opera artists showing up as neighbors and guests in their own community in a spirit of collaboration and service.

This paradigm shift has made Opera Omaha a leader in civic practice among American opera companies and a model held up by OPERA America for others to follow. Opera Omaha general director Roger Weitz traces the program’s genesis to a 2014-2015 strategic planning process that identified civic practice as the means to truly connect with and make a positive difference with community.

‘If we’re going to not just survive in the future but thrive in the future it’s imperative that we are relevant and accessible to more people than just those who choose to come to staged opera productions on the weekend,’ Weitz said. ‘Part of the underpinning of that is how do we thank our community; how do we show them that we appreciate and make use of the philanthropic support we get to be worthy of their support. If we want to really earn it, then we need to contribute to the community by more than just

putting on operas at the Orpheum. As an organization we decided our mission is to significantly, legitimately contribute to our community to improve the quality of life of residents. That process was the beginning seed of this whole program.

### THE BUSINESS OF BEING A FELLOW MEANS INTERSECTING WITH DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES AND ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES

In their work as civic practitioners, Fellows make a two-year commitment to the company and the community. Experienced Fellows mentor newcomers. Presently, Opera Omaha has four active Fellows. Two are in their second and final year of the program. The other pair are in their first year. The selection process recently concluded for the next Fellowship class. Lauren Medici, Director of Engagement Programs said the program draws ever greater interest nationally and internationally and attracts a strong candidate field.

Fellows bring their individual and collective expertise to work alongside experts and residents in the community.

‘We select those artists who have expertise in their craft and passion to serve others,’ Weitz said. ‘They understand they’re coming here to learn and to make this a truly collaborative co-creation, rather than them just coming in to present what they do. There’s nothing wrong with an artist wanting the attention and adulation that come with performing on stage, but that’s not what this program is about. It’s a recognition of the fact that you don’t

have all the answers, you don’t know what the community really needs until you meet with the community and get trained in what each partner organization does and who they serve. That training is a big part of what prepares our Fellows to work in community.’

Opera Omaha has cultivated some 40 community partners its Fellows engage with at various times. Partners inhabit a variety of locations and service missions, in keeping with the program’s tenet to meet people where they are, diversity in all its forms is embraced.

‘Diversity doesn’t just mean having more people of color around, it means accepting everyone has differences and those differences should be celebrated,’ said first year Fellow Fernando Antonio Montejano. ‘We do workshops for many different communities. Sometimes that means differently abled communities, too.’

Gotta Be Me, a nonprofit promoting the inclusion of adults with disabilities in community, worked with Fellows to write, produce and perform their very own rock opera. ‘During this process,’ GBM founder and executive director Tiffany Clifton said, ‘our all-abilities and disabilities crew learned how to sing from real professional opera singers, what it meant to block on stage, how to create sets, costumes, choreography, lighting set-ups, and so many more vocational-based tasks. We now

have GBM crew members looking at how to work in the industry.’

The pandemic’s caused the company to pivot from in-person to virtual programming, including moving Fellowship activities online.

‘If we are to be resilient and relevant amid a pandemic that prevents in-person gatherings, then we are called upon to be an active part of our community in other ways,’ Medici said.

In their role as creative and artistic resources, Fellows facilitated an Intercultural Senior Center (ISC) music and art project to help foster a sense of connection during this time of isolation. Each of the 60 participants, representing a diverse range of cultural heritages, drew on his/her personal experience to choose a song that brings them joy and to create an artwork symbolizing what the song means to them. Opera Omaha graphic designer Rachel Austin contributed to the resulting Great ISC Songbook.

‘This switch to teaching virtually is opening a lot of doors,’ Montejano said ‘It’s reminding us there’s a bunch of technology we can use to try and reach people that we hadn’t thought about before. The possibilities are endless for the kinds of ways we can reach people and still make it meaningful.’

‘With engagement programming we’ve found there’s a lot of things that work better in a virtual space, such as our Poetry & Music project,’ said Lauren Medici. ‘We were able to do writing workshops for students across the state. Instead of offering this to just under a hundred students as before, we had over 500 students experience workshops from Omaha to Scottsbluff. Some of our partners are really digging online programming. They can be more themselves in those spaces.’

Second-year Fellow Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor, a singer, acknowledged, ‘Initially I wasn’t sold on virtual workshops. It shocked me when we started programming over Zoom and we were able to make the connections we usually make. All the things I value about the work we do can continue in this time even over Zoom and that’s sort of amazing. As a teaching artist it stretches me in how I read the room in what people are feeling and what they need. That’s been good for me to grow in this time.’

The power of collaboration has never been so evident.

*To continue reading the full article, please visit [operaomaha.org/blog](https://operaomaha.org/blog)*





Introducing Music Director  
ANKUSH KUMAR BAHL

# A DYNAMIC NEW ERA

Bold Artistic Vision



2021 / 2022

## SEASON

ON SALE NOW

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## 2020/2021 FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMMING PARTNERS



# POETRY & MUSIC PROJECT

Now in its fourth year, the Poetry & Music Project connects student poets and their words with composers to create original music and explore the connections between poetry and music.

In Fall 2020, Opera Omaha and the Nebraska Writers Collective invited students in grades K-12 from Nebraska and Iowa to submit works of poetry on themes of **Emotion, Connection, Uncovering History, Stuck in Place/Getting Un-Stuck**. Over 500 elementary, middle and high school students across the state took part in Poetry & Music writing workshops facilitated by NWC teaching artists and project composer Frances Pollock.

Opera Omaha received 69 submissions from 59 poets in grades 2 through 12, across 9 Nebraska counties: Burt, Cedar, Cuming, Custer, Douglas, Hall, Lancaster, Otoe, Sarpy plus Anita County, Iowa.

There were many outstanding poems submitted to the project, and after a blind review project composers Frances Pollock and Matt Browne, alumni of the American Opera Project Composers & the Voice program, selected 11 poems to set to music based on what inspired them.

In Spring 2021, poets and composers gathered virtually for music workshops. These workshops were a time for poets and composers to collaborate on the original pieces of music with Head of Music Sean Kelly and Opera Omaha's Holland Community Opera Fellows.

## POEMS SELECTED TO BE SET TO MUSIC

**"Untold History" Lily Barry**, Lincoln Southwest High School  
Music Composed by Frances Pollock, Performed by Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor

**"Mom :)" Harper Burgert**, Whitetail Elementary School  
Music Composed by Frances Pollock, Performed by Nicholas Davis

**"To: Happiness" Connor Callen**, Hayward Elementary School  
Music Composed by Matt Browne, Performed by Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor

**"Dear Grandpa" Heidi Donegan**, Callaway Public School  
Music Composed by Frances Pollock, Performed by Nicholas Davis

**"Ode to 2020" Brooklyn Grandgenett**, Lyons-Decatur Northeast  
Music Composed by Frances Pollock, Performed by Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor

**"On the Inside" Kyson Lammers**, Holy Trinity Elementary School  
Music Composed by Matt Browne, Performed by Jared Hiscock

**"The Lovers of Modena" Ava Larson**, Brownell Talbot  
Music Composed by Matt Browne, Performed by Jared Hiscock

**"Emotion" Zane Maltas**, Lincoln Southwest High School  
Music Composed by Matt Browne, Performed by Jared Hiscock

**"Human Connection" MacKenzie Painter**, Lincoln Southwest High School  
Music Composed by Frances Pollock, Performed by Nicholas Davis

**"The Seed" Beckett Pinder**, Whitetail Elementary School  
Music Composed by Matt Browne, Performed by Nicholas Davis

**"Un-Stuck" Brooklyn Westlund**, Lincoln Southwest High School  
Music Composed by Matt Browne, Performed by Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor

The Poetry & Music Project pieces premiered with a virtual concert on May 16, 2021. The concert featured the 11 original pieces performed by HCOF Fellows Jared Hiscock, Gwenna Fairchild-Taylor, and Nicholas Davis, hosted by Fellow Fernando Antonio Montejano and Nebraska State Poet Matt Mason.

The Poetry & Music Project Book including all poems submitted to the project, and recordings of the pieces are now available on Opera Omaha's website.



The Poetry & Music Project is produced in partnership with Nebraska Writers Collective and The America Opera Project.

The Poetry & Music Project is funded in part by Humanities Nebraska.





# THREE STORIES. SHARED ANEW. TOGETHER.



**The Capulets and the Montagues**  
*Star-Crossed Lovers, Boldly Retold*

Vincenzo Bellini  
October 15 & 17, 2021

**Sweeney Todd**  
*The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*

Stephen Sondheim  
February 25 & 27, 2022

**Eugene Onegin**  
*A Novel Romance, Achingly Poetic*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
April 22 & 24, 2022

## WELCOME TO A NEW SEASON OF OPERA

### THREE STORIES

For its long-anticipated return to live theater, Opera Omaha calls on some of the world's most beloved characters to tell their unforgettable stories. Romeo and Juliet are the heart of *The Capulets and the Montagues* in a dramatic depiction by the celebrated Italian composer Vincenzo Bellini. Sweeney Todd, a legendary villain of Victorian England's "penny dreadfuls," is the sinister force driving Stephen Sondheim's Tony Award-winning masterpiece. Love, loss, and remorse are the hallmarks of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, a triumph of classic Russian literature written by that country's most famous poet, Alexander Pushkin.

### SHARED ANEW

To mark a truly monumental season, Opera Omaha will create three brand new productions for the Orpheum Theater; each opening night is a world premiere! These new theatrical interpretations are the joyful outpouring of phenomenal creatives unleashing their artistry on stage after too long of a pause. Directors James Darrah (Opera Omaha ONE Festival Artistic Director), Rosetta Cucchi (Artistic Director of Ireland's Wexford Festival), and Susan Clement-Toberer (Producing Artistic Director of Omaha's BLUEBARN Theater) are the visionary leaders behind these exciting premieres.

### TOGETHER

There is nothing like the thrill of live theater! The excitement and anticipation of the crowd as it fills the auditorium; the hush as the lights go down and the curtain goes up; the palpable connection between performer and audience as the story unfolds. All of these captivating experiences, felt by patrons and artists alike, are sure to rise to new heights in Opera Omaha's momentous return to the Orpheum Theater in the 2021/2022 Season.

**Three stories, shared anew, together;  
we can't wait to celebrate with you.**

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS, BOLDLY RETOLD

Previously slated to debut in our 2020 ONE Festival, Bellini’s bel canto masterpiece is a seldom-seen telling of Romeo and Juliet, the infamous “star-crossed lovers” engulfed by rival political factions on the brink of war. Most commonly known through Shakespeare but inspired here from writings of the Italian Renaissance, *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* gives thrilling voice to one of the world’s most overwhelming and vital love stories.

This new production by ONE Festival Artistic Director James Darrah is a dark and visually rich exploration of love and loss illuminated by a powerful ensemble of world-class artists, designers and dancers, including the return of soprano Andriana Chuchman (2015 *A Flowering Tree*, 2017 *Flight*) as Juliet. True to Bellini’s original score, Romeo is performed by a mezzo soprano, the acclaimed Cecelia Hall, in her Opera Omaha debut.

New Production and Company Premiere. Music by Vincenzo Bellini. Libretto by Felice Romani. Performed in Italian with English supertitles.

THE CAPULETS  
AND THE  
MONTAGUES

*I Capuleti e I Montecchi*



**Conductor**  
Christopher Allen\*

**Director**  
James Darrah

**Giulietta**  
Andriana Chuchman

**Romeo**  
Cecelia Hall\*

**Tebaldo**  
Jesus Garcia

**Capellio**  
Jeffrey Beruan\*

**Lorenzo**  
Daniel Mobbs\*

**Dancers**  
Lindsey Matheis & Sam Shapiro

OCTOBER  
15 & 17



# WAIT, WHY IS ROMEO PLAYED BY A WOMAN?

## SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT OPERATIC REPERTOIRE, GENDER AND EXPECTATION

Article by James Darrah

In choosing *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*, the most pressing question on everyone's mind was: what are we going to do with the fact that Romeo, the romantic "male" lead, was originally and intentionally written for a female mezzo-soprano voice type? While I don't have any hard data to back up this claim, I would argue that this basic fact in casting has even resulted in *Capuleti* also having far fewer performances in this country than some of Bellini's other works, let alone other bel canto repertoire. Are other opera companies or board members scared of a woman assuming and singing such a classically and universally known male role? Does it take a superstar singer to get the piece programmed? How will audiences react? How will they ever cope? Traditionally, an opera company would cast a mezzo soprano and then design a production where that singer goes into hair, makeup and costume out of your sight, before the show, to then eternally present as "male" for the duration of the opera.

There is some artistic and historical precedence for this too: if you've ever seen *The Marriage of Figaro*, Mozart of course intentionally wrote the male teen Cherubino as a mezzo soprano voice type and the role is almost exclusively sung by women. Omaha audiences have seen a woman, playing a young boy, dressed as a young boy, who then in the plot of the opera also dresses as a woman in disguise. It's complicated gender wise for poor Cherubino, yes, but most often the singer just presents as male for the entire time and the audience buys in as a sort of cheeky formality that explores teenage lust and a performance practice in line with the 18th century. It's fun and works and often produces laughs.

*Capuleti*, as a tragedy, doesn't seem to have the same luxury of tone and style afforded to Mozart. As we (thankfully) increasingly move toward a society that encourages, allows and even embraces a freedom of gender identity and expression, I actually find I have little interest in adhering to an expectation about the role of Romeo in terms of

gender. It seems borderline ignorant to assume Romeo MUST be male in this opera. Yes, the story was written that way, but to keep opera a living, breathing form—I've decided to take into account the reality of our casting in 2020. We have a fantastic mezzo soprano, Cecelia Hall, as our Romeo. It was written for her voice type. Can this production be about two human beings rather than a male and female heteronormative love story? Many of us know the tale of Romeo and Juliet through Shakespeare, but I think Bellini's opera offers us a wonderful opportunity to explore the piece today. Romeo is one of the only Montagues in the cast—the role spends a large amount of time infiltrating the Capulet stronghold.

As I started to dwell on this element of gender, and then the plot of the opera, I was actually inspired by thinking earlier than Mozart to composer G.F. Handel. His great baroque opera-seria *Alcina* features a female warrior and knight who ventures to a dangerous enchanted isle to rescue her husband from the clutches of an evil sorceress.

Interestingly, and true to Handel's source material, this female knight disguises herself as "male"—both as a protection of her identity, but also in order to protect her life and power in a world in which women often have less power and are more at risk. This gave us an interesting solution. In an opera dominated by men and politicians and warring ideologies driven by men—could Romeo disguise herself as male less from personal desire or an adherence to traditional dramaturgy, but more in order to achieve some level of equality with the powerful men?

Can we explore the feminine and masculine sides of a famed character? Can we transcend a focus on gender identity and speak more to ideological differences, a shared and common desire to express ourselves freely, love who we want to love and be treated equally?

This program note is going to print far in advance of day one in the rehearsal room, so while I could explain some of the past year and a half of design preparation and delve into endless thoughts with the creative team, I'm also happily unsure of what the rehearsal room will actually yield just in terms of chemistry, mood

and our overall production's final message. We have, in our two leads, some formidable actors who will certainly imbue these roles with a powerful sense of love and loss as we begin to work and, even if I want to focus on this doomed couple's love, humanity and their attraction, we will work to also earn their tragic end regardless of gender identity. We've similarly tried to strip away a lot of the excess 19th century formality in the physical production: the design is both a world foreign to our own and steeped in decorum, but also simultaneously mysterious and contemporary. Characters emerge and disappear into an unknown vast space—only colliding amidst the tombs and graves of those they have mutually lost.

As a director, I'm far more interested in what one might get out of the universality and enduring power of a Romeo and Juliet story for today's world. Bellini's tale is based more directly on the Italian Renaissance tales of Romeo and Juliet (here the Italian: Giulietta)—and one of the most noticeable differences is that the Capulets and the Montagues exist as intense political factions. The city of Verona within this opera is at war with polarized, parti-

san, divisive politics. It's an ugly mess—both sides unwilling to broker peace on any other terms than their own, spilled blood constantly threatened both literally and metaphorically. While I've intentionally avoided any blatant political statements in the production beyond the gender freedom of Romeo, I am instead focused more on a shared human folly: regardless of who we are and our own sense of identity, sometimes we encounter people who are ignorant, headstrong or unwilling to accept those personal truths. The tragedy in the tale is in realizing that ignorance too late. Sometimes the people with the most vulnerable voices lose...and may we all be aware of that fragility...

James Darrah,  
ONE Festival Artistic Director

*Director James Darrah is Artistic Director of the ONE Festival and will direct The Capulets and the Montagues, previously scheduled to debut at ONE Festival 2020.*

A MUSICAL THRILLER

This dark, Tony Award winner for Best Musical by Stephen Sondheim has thrilled opera audiences across the nation. Leading an all-star cast are two of Omaha’s most dynamic and acclaimed artists, Conductor Hal France (Opera Omaha’s Artistic Director from 1995-2005) and Director Susan Clement-Toberer (Producing Artistic Director, BLUEBARN Theatre), making her Opera Omaha debut.

Sweeney Todd, whose real name is Benjamin Barker, uses his new alias to resume work in his barber shop above Mrs. Lovett’s struggling pie shop after being wrongfully sentenced to life imprisonment by the corrupt Judge Turpin. After swearing vengeance against the judge that tore his family apart, Todd and Lovett plot a unique plan that helps them both and leads them down a dangerous, thrilling path with deadly consequences. This all-star cast features Zachary James in the title role of Sweeney Todd and Emily Pulley (2019 *Faust*, 2002 *Carmen*, 2000 *Falstaff*), returning to Opera Omaha in the role of Nellie Lovett.

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Book by Hugh Wheeler.  
From an Adaptation by Christopher Bond.

SWEENEY  
TODD

*The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*



Originally Directed on Broadway by Harold Prince. Orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick. Originally Produced on Broadway by Richard Barr, Charles Woodward, Robert Fryer, Mary Lea Johnson, Martin Richards in Association with Dean and Judy Manos. *Sweeney Todd* is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI. [www.MTishows.com](http://www.MTishows.com)

<b>Conductor</b> Hal France	<b>Director</b> Susan Clement-Toberer*	<b>Sweeney Todd</b> Zachary James*	<b>Nellie Lovett</b> Emily Pulley	<b>Johanna Barker</b> Ashley Emerson	<b>Anthony Hope</b> Jonathan Johnson*	<b>Judge Turpin</b> Rodney Nelman*
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FEBRUARY  
25 & 27



# OPERA OR MUSICAL?

## SONDHEIM MADE SWEENEY TO SCARE AN AUDIENCE

Published August 04, 2016 | Article by Diane Nottle for everythingsondheim.org

Jamie Bernstein, daughter of Leonard Bernstein, interviewed Stephen Sondheim onstage on July 30, 2016, at the Glimmerglass Festival.

The big revelation instantly splashed across the media was that Stephen Sondheim’s new musical is to have its premiere Off Broadway at the Public Theater in late 2017 — “if I can finish the score in time.” But in an onstage conversation at Glimmerglass Opera on July 30, Sondheim made what may be an even more revealing admission: “I’m not an opera fan.”

“I’m a musical theater fan,” he said. When opera and theater come together, “as in *Carmen*, I’m a fan.”

The sometimes-blurry relationship between the two genres emerged as the theme in Sondheim’s conversation with Jamie Bernstein at Glimmerglass, the summer opera festival in Cooperstown, N.Y., a remote upstate town otherwise known for the Baseball Hall of Fame. Introduced by Francesca Zambello, the noted opera and theater director who heads Glimmerglass, the two entered to a standing ovation from a full house. Sondheim pointed out that he had

known Bernstein — daughter of Leonard Bernstein, his collaborator on *West Side Story* — since “just after she was born.”

In the conversation, they spoke of “building bridges or knocking down walls” between genres. While Sondheim placed himself firmly on the musical theater side, he acknowledged the connections to opera in his own work.

“The closest I came was *Sweeney Todd*,” he said. “But they’re not the same thing.”

Second-closest was *A Little Night Music*, which he categorized as operetta or “opera-esque” rather than opera. “It uses operatic techniques,” he said, among them leitmotif. “I’ve always been attracted to leitmotif,” he said. “Movie music is nothing but.” What makes *Night Music* an operetta, he said, is “primarily the attitude — the lightness.”

*West Side Story* might be considered a close third, or perhaps a close call, chiefly because of Leonard Bernstein’s vision for the show. Bernstein loved both forms, Sondheim said, as his body of work makes clear: in addition

to *West Side Story* and *Candide* (to whose 1974 Broadway revival Sondheim contributed additional lyrics, and which Glimmerglass produced in 2015), it includes the musicals *On the Town* and *Wonderful Town*, and the operas *Trouble in Tahiti* (at Glimmerglass in 2015) and *A Quiet Place* (which incorporated the smaller *Trouble in Tahiti*). “But he also knew the differences,” Sondheim said.

“He had ambition,” Sondheim said, an understatement that drew laughter from the audience. Bernstein wanted his work to be performed on opera stages. “The rest of us were writing a musical.”

Bernstein, he said, “was always complaining about how we were tamping down” his operatic ambitions for the show. He thought, for example, that Maria should have a suicide aria, a case in which “we may have tamped down where it didn’t belong.”

“What really counts is, does a piece work in an opera house in front of an opera audience? Because it’s something else on Broadway,” Sondheim said, citing differences

in works by Gian Carlo Menotti produced in both opera houses and Broadway theaters.

When New York City Opera presented *Sweeney Todd* in 2004, he recalled, some in the audience were shocked that the Beggar Woman turned out to be Sweeney’s wife, presumed long dead after taking poison. “They had never been 10 blocks south to Broadway,” he said. Still, audiences from one genre find their way to understanding the other, primarily through the proportion of speech to singing. “They recognize what’s going on,” Sondheim said, “and they adjust.”

In the case of *West Side Story*, he said, the connection to opera is “not through the singing, but the orchestral scoring.”

“It doesn’t feel like an opera to me,” he said. “It’s a musical with these monumental pieces of music, but it’s not through-composed.” Later, he added, “Thematic ideas are there, but it’s not composed as an opera.”

Most important, though, is storytelling. “Fear of storytelling,” as Sondheim put it, is in fact one of the greatest weaknesses he finds in musical theater composers who are inexperienced or trying to cross over from other genres, such as pop. He recalled working with

young composers in a program at the National Theatre in London. “They come from a different way of making music,” he said. “They think in terms of theatricality — rock concerts are theatrical — but not storytelling. The story is what counts.” (“Oh, I see,” he quoted one young songwriter as saying. “It’s an art, not a hobby.”)

“Can it be done?” Jamie Bernstein asked, referring to creating musicals successfully in a pop idiom.

“It has been done,” Sondheim answered, citing Jonathan Larson’s *Rent* and Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*. Such composers, he said, “understand what theater is about.”

Storytelling was certainly what mattered to Sondheim when he was writing *Sweeney Todd*, which was being performed at Glimmerglass twice the day of his conversation with Bernstein, sandwiched between performances. The Demon Barber tale goes back at least as far as an 1846 penny dreadful, *The String of Pearls*, but the Christopher Bond play of the 1970s that inspired the musical added elements of the Jacobean *Revenger’s Tragedy* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

“I made Sweeney to scare an audience,” he said in response to a question from the audience. “That was my entire purpose.”

As to the eternal question of whether the show is musical theater or perhaps an opera, Sondheim said flat out: “Sweeney is a musical.”

“When I was writing it,” he added, “I was writing a movie.” He compared it to the kind of movie melodramas that once starred Bette Davis. “It’s still melodrama and still kitsch,” Sondheim said, “but when you dig into it, you ennoble them.” And after all, isn’t that a big part of what opera is all about?

*Diane Nottle is a New York-based writer on the arts, language and travel. She was an editor at The New York Times for 20 years, specializing in cultural news.*

A NOVEL ROMANCE, ACHINGLY POETIC

When sensitive Tatyana bares her soul in a love letter to the dashing Eugene Onegin, he coldly rejects her and flirts with her sister, resulting in a deadly duel with his trusted friend, Lensky. Years later, Onegin returns to Russia, tortured by guilt and remorse. Opera Omaha favorites Steven White and Rosetta Cucchi will transport literary Russian romance to life in this achingly beautiful tale of longing, remorse, and love unfulfilled—with breathtaking music by Tchaikovsky (“The Nutcracker,” “Swan Lake”).

Alexander Elliott (2018 *Pagliacci*, 2017 *Così fan tutte*) returns to Opera Omaha in the title role of Eugene Onegin with Lauren Michelle making her Orpheum Theater debut as Tatyana.

Music and libretto by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Based on the novel by Alexander Pushkin.

EUGENE  
ONEGIN



**Conductor**  
Steven White

**Director**  
Rosetta Cucchi

**Eugene Onegin**  
Alexander Elliott

**Tatyana**  
Lauren Michelle\*

**Vladimir Lensky**  
Arseny Yakovlev\*

**Olga**  
Hilary Ginther\*

**Filippievna**  
Victoria Livengood

APRIL  
22 & 24



# OPERAtion: What's My Why? - *Eugene Onegin*

FEATURING SIMON DYER (SD), VINCENT TURREGANO (VT) AND MELANIE BACALING (MB)

Excerpt from podcast OPERATION: What's My Why? on Instagram and Twitter @operationwmw

**SD:** So what are we talking about today, Melanie?

**MB:** Today we bring you to the land of *Eugene Onegin* . . . let's address this from the two main pairs that we have. Onegin and Tatyana. Tatyana is a young girl intelligent, really intense, she meets Onegin who has a neighbor, she falls in love with him, writes him a letter to tell him so and then he friend zones her. Some years later, she finds herself married to a prince, Onegin sees her and decides he is in fact in love with her, and then she shuts it down. And just to be clear, she stays with her prince and leaves Onegin. And then we have Olga and Lensky. Olga is Tatyana's younger sister, Lensky is a poet and Onegin's friend and they are in love and then at a ball Onegin gets mad but he's there because Lensky convinced him to go there. And then Onegin spitefully flirts and dances with Olga just to make Lensky jealous and he does indeed get very jealous because then he loses it, challenges Onegin to a duel ... and then unfortunately, Lensky loses his life. And in a very short nutshell that is Eugene Onegin

**SD:** Well done! So it's a love story, I guess?

Melanie Bacaling: It is ... for any of our listeners who might be friends of something like ... Bridgerton ... very much the same flavor of storyline.

**SD:** Okay, I wonder if it's one of those situations where an opera is a classic kind of tale where we have these archetypal storytelling plot devices, you know, love triangles, jealous friend and ...

**MB:** love, unrequited love, that later is not unrequited.

**SD:** Confusing love ...

**MB:** Confusing love, indeed. But that's not what makes me love it. I mean, that is a portion of why I love it. To me, musically, it is one of the most delicious operas out there. I just think that the orchestration is so luscious, that Tchaikovsky does a really fantastic job of storytelling through the

music, particularly with Tatyana. And one of the main scenes that is most popular and well known is the famous letter scene in which Tatyana writes out all of her feelings towards Onegin. And it's a rather lengthy scene. It's a tour de force for the soprano singing it and she goes on this journey of "Should I write it? Should I not write it? What do I say? How do I say it?" and you can just hear the anxiety and excitement build up in the orchestration? It's just brilliant in my opinion.

**SD:** How young is Tatyana?

**MB:** Tatyana is, like coming of age? I don't know specifically in a Pushkin novel. Exactly how old she is. But in my brain. She's like, 17 years old-ish. Like still young, but a little bit on the older side.

**SD:** Okay, and she's quite strong from what I remember. She's quite a strong character. She's got a lot of chutzpah to her, even in how much she falls in love with him.

**MB:** She, to me, she is such a complex character in that we get to know her really well through the letter scene, but also just in the way she expresses herself to her sister, to her mother, to Onegin later on that she is the opposite of fickle where everything she does and says and thinks is incredibly intentional.

I think that (Onegin) is just as intense as Tatyana and just as considered ... And in the way that he's so incredibly pragmatic and practical. So, let's break down what happens specifically after Tatyana writes this letter to him, where she full out confesses all of her feelings to him. He replies by showing up in person to her and says more or less, "Thank you for this letter. And it's really sweet that you express all these emotions. However . . ." no, the way he says it is like "I would choose you but honestly it would be boring. The second we got married once things become habitual. It's not for me, I love you but as a brother." It's the ultimate friendzone line ...

**SD:** Right!

**MB:** Where he kind of mansplains her feelings to her by saying you'll probably be better off leaving these feelings to yourself. And in the future you'll learn more that this isn't really what you should do. Like express yourself in this way ...

**SD:** Okay. Do you think that that really is a manifestation of his fear of commitment?

**MB:** Yes. Well, because he's also someone who is ... to me he seems to enjoy being out and about in society, not being tied down.

**SD:** I don't know how much of the libretto is verbatim text. But it's an extremely short novella. And it's basically the exact same story.

**VT:** Oh, cool.

**SD:** There's very little or no deviation from that story.

**MB:** I think there's something really intriguing about the themes of love, unrequited love, drama that we like to feed into those kinds of stories that are sort of like "Gossip Girl". What I would want to really highlight and what my focus would be, is the journey of Tatyana, because I think it's incredibly refreshing for an opera to show the complexity of a female character, from her text, from her music, from her melodies that she sings, and then to end up in, ultimately a position of power I see. Because in the end, when Onegin comes back and says, actually, no, I was a fool, I love you. And she's like, "Listen, I'll always have these feelings for you. But I'm good. I also really love Prince Gremin." And I think she realizes for herself in society that she's in a really advantageous place. And her power is in saying "no" to him. And I appreciate having a complex, powerful female lead. And I'm personally of the opinion that the opera should be called Tatyana and not Eugene Onegin. I don't know how you guys feel about that.

**VT:** I'm really fascinated by what you just said, Mel, I had never considered the final scene and what you just talked about, in

that way before. I always considered her to be still wrapped up in that youthful imagination of romance, being like, of course, I love you. But then her adulthood and her commitment to her own dignity, in the position that she has as the Princess Gremin, is what she caves into. She decides to commit to her action and that thoughtful way that you mentioned earlier. So that's really interesting that maybe she is not only committing to that, but she's doing so because she sees that advantageousness ... if that's a word, that advantage. And if she, if she actually *does* love Gremin, in a way... I think that the story is centered around the actions that Eugene Onegin takes in the way it affects others. And in that way, the story is about him. But in many ways, it's not about him. It's really about Lensky and Tatyana. And that's interesting.

**SD:** I wonder if the real story is that of the different types of love we experience in our lives and the way in which we experience love because she does love Gremin. Right? She is in my vague memory of like pretending to clink a champagne glass in the final scene. I feel like she does talk about how her love for Gremin. Gremin certainly loves her. And I think it's a comfortable love. It's a slightly less romanticized love. Which is not to say it's less romantic, but it is very different to that love she feels for Onegin, and correct me if I'm wrong, but Onegin rejects love throughout the whole opera, and then finally at the end wants that love and has a bit of a breakdown when he is rejected, is that true?

**MB:** Yeah, I see Onegin, as we said, as somebody who potentially fears commitment, but also has this pride about his own intelligence about his opinions of the world that he makes very apparent to Tatyana. And I think that once he realizes that he is in fact in love, which I think is kind of debatable, like, does he actually love Tatyana? Or is it just him seeing her with Gremin that sparks any sort of emotion, that he's finally acknowledging? Because Heaven forbid he have emotions? And that's what sparks him to confront her and be like, "No, I do love you." But also in talking about Lensky, and the relationship of Onegin and Lensky as

their friendship. I find it fascinating that we get to see a man who is full heartedly in love with his beloved Olga and expresses that and is incredibly passionate in that way. And I find it interesting that he is also a poet as his occupation. It makes me wonder like, would we be able to believe that kind of sincerity if he wasn't given poet is an occupation? I don't know. And I don't know if that actually matters.

**SD:** I'm curious about another thing here as well is that the tenor in a show is often the romantic lead. And the baritone is often the bad guy, or the kind of other man in the love triangle. And it seems to me that Tchaikovsky's done that or through Pushkin has done that here in a slightly more subtle way, but I wonder if we are signaled through the voice types into believing Onegin is not the good guy and Lensky is the good guy.

**MB:** I think there's definitely some psychological validity to that ... the fact that our ears have been trained just by the standards of opera to think: romantic lead, male equals tenor, romantic lead female equals soprano, more often than not, villain equals lower voice.

Which is interesting, because Lensky is betrothed to Olga and Olga is a mezzo slash contralto.

**SD:** But she's Tatyana's younger sister, right?

**MB:** Younger sister indeed. And the one who is depicted to be more ...

**SD:** Impulsive, flirtatious?

**MB:** Yeah.

**SD:** Yea, Young.

**MB:** Yeah, just younger . . . more vibrant, effervescent.

**VT:** What I think is interesting about what you've said, it's always fascinating to talk to you both. I always hear things of are perspectives that I just never considered. And I don't think I've ever thought about the psychological use of voice type for this kind of characterization. I mean, I know it exists. But I haven't thought about it in the context of

this opera, to Lensky and his ability to express himself emotionally and that power coming from him being a poet. I don't know what Pushkin intended. And daren't say I know what Tchaikovsky intended but for me, the tragedy of Lensky is similar to the tragedy of Onegin. Lensky is so self-obsessed with his idea of how this romance is going to go. His jealousy and his own sense of pride having been slightly wounded at one party by his girlfriend choosing to dance with Onegin. Yeah, just to tease Lensky brought him to the point where he "needed" in quotes to duel Onegin. And then neither of them having the gumption to say this isn't actually what we want, we are not going to go through with this idiotic duel, and Lensky dies for it. And Eugene loses maybe his only friend. I don't know if that's true, but I mean, it seems ...

**SD:** What I'm hearing you say is that the moral of the story is, "impulsive, jealous, insecure, fragile men cause problems."

**VT:** For themselves.

**MB:** Ding ding ding!

**SD:** So I think with this one, it's been pretty easy to figure out why you love it. And as someone who did not love it ... didn't hate it. I just have no real recollection of being in it, which means it didn't make a huge impact. Although the singers were wonderful if you're listening. So I've been convinced, I see it a different way. Definitely. And I'm really curious to watch it again, actually, with that mindset going on. But just for our audience sum up for us quickly Mel. You know, like, why do we love it? Why is it relevant and why should we perform it?

**MB:** Simply, the music is absolutely stunning. The storyline is one that will resonate with audiences, I think, for a long time ... stories of love and heartbreak and the complexities of relationships within society and societal pressures. And it's just really beautiful music storytelling.

SPONSOR HIGHLIGHT



## NURTURING PEOPLE'S BODIES AND SPIRITS

### THE SIMONS USE THEIR OMAHA STEAKS EMPIRE TO SUPPORT CIVIC AND ARTS ENDEAVORS THAT IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

by Leo Adam Biga

For the founding family of international food manufacturer Omaha Steaks, giving back is a multigenerational legacy rooted in community, aesthetics, conscience and practicality.

Since the company's 1917 start as Table Meat Supply, its family owners, the Simons, have recognized an obligation to the city they call home. It only makes sense that the stronger the community you do business in, the better off your employees and company will be. Philanthropy as a family civic practice began under third generation company leader Lester Simon. He and his wife Trudy instilled in their three sons, Alan, Fred and Steve, the belief that sustaining the Jewish and broader community was part of being a good corporate neighbor. The elders made sure to expose the boys to classical music, fine art and other creative expressions in addition to grounding them in social and business responsibilities.

By the time the brothers joined the company's executive ranks as fourth generation leaders, the family's philanthropy extended to a wide range of organizations. Because the brothers appreciated the arts as cultural and community assets, it naturally followed that Omaha Steaks became a primary supporter of these linchpins. Indeed, the maturation of Omaha's arts scene could not have happened without the nurturing of major donors such as the Simons and Dick Holland.

Fred's well known passion for music, musical theater and particularly opera led Omaha Steaks to be a major Opera Omaha donor. He aided its evolution into a full-time professional company, serving as board president in the late 1970s. He financially supported and attended the opera for four decades. He and his wife Eve also supported the Omaha Symphony, Film Streams, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha Performing Arts and the Bemis

Center for Contemporary Arts. They gave to and volunteered with the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. His personal digital catalog of all the operas he attended around the nation and world comprise a unique archive on the Opera Omaha website.

Meanwhile, Alan's love of symphonic music led to his personal involvement on the Omaha Symphony board. He also served on the board of directors for the Boy Scouts of America, Goodwill Industries, the Salvation Army and Omaha Children's Hospital. He was the Information Technology Chair for the Creighton University Board of Trustees.

Steve devoted his own stewardship in service of the Jewish Federation of Omaha and Temple Israel Synagogue, on whose boards he was active.

The fifth generation of Simons has continued the tradition of good corporate citizenship. Senior vice president Todd Simon and his late cousin Bruce Simon, who was president and chief executive officer, carried on the love for the arts and community that their late fathers, Fred and Alan, respectively, and their uncle Steve modeled.

"I got a love for culture from my dad. He and my uncles made it a priority to support the arts. As a result, as a company we are well beyond having to be sold on the arts," said Todd. "We know their value. We've accepted the arts are part of that vibrant culture that allows you to attract and retain people. They also provide a great environment for our employee team and for the community. That's why our support extends beyond sponsorship. We feel like we need to be good stewards of the arts community, which helps strengthen the local economy because a vibrant arts scene attracts people that can spark creativity and innovation.

"The arts are good for our souls, good for our business, good for our community. It's a triple whammy in terms of benefits."

Those benefits include the commerce the arts generate.

"A 2007 study on the economic impact of the performing arts in Omaha became a really great rallying cry for arts organizations, for the Chamber of Commerce, for arts supporters," Todd noted, "because it actually gave a dollars and cents understanding of how the arts impact the economy."

#### **SUPPORTING THE ARTS AS A CONVENER OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

Besides the tangible infusion of capital that spending by artists and arts patrons generates, there's the intangible value of the arts as a convener in communal spaces. Just as Omaha Steaks food products provide a focal point for gatherings, whether at the dinner table, a tailgate party or a backyard barbecue, the arts promote community, too, whether at a theater, a concert hall or a park. During the pandemic, the arts have embraced virtual platforms to connect artists with each other and with audiences. Funding from Omaha Steaks and other friends of area arts organizations has helped sustain these high tech connectivity and programming efforts that maintain and create a sense of community,

"What it really comes down to is our brand is about family, it's about quality, and it's about bringing people together," Todd said. "The arts, like food, is about this togetherness experience, so it's kind of natural for us to promote that."



Omaha Steaks also leverages its resources to give employees access to cultural and community activities.

"We make a point to engage our employees in the arts by hosting employee days at many organizations we support like the Joslyn, El Museo Latino, the Omaha Children's Museum and Jazz on the Green. We offer tickets to events and performances so our employees can share in these experiences with their families. We also run an annual membership drive for employees that allows them to join various organizations at a discount."

Employees are further encouraged to volunteer at community nonprofits, including arts, cultural and civic organizations.

Art as inspiration is as near as the walls of the Omaha Steaks headquarters, which display an impressive workplace collection. Some pieces in the collection are loaned out for public exhibition.

When it comes to how the Simons intersect with the arts groups they support, they take a hands-off approach when it comes to programming.

"One of the things characteristic of our support," Todd said, "is that we let the professionals set the direction within their own organizations. If the vision is coherent and compelling, we support it. We don't have a predisposed idea of what an organization has to be or do in order for it to get funding. We

appreciate innovation and risk-taking and are willing to support that."

"I think Opera Omaha is a really good example. Something all arts organizations struggle with is making sure they're relevant and reaching their core audience but also reaching new audiences. General director Roger Weitz and his team have done a really good job of thinking through what a contemporary opera company in the Midwest look likes in this time, even before COVID, and how to innovate and create super interesting programming. He's able to articulate a vision for the company and then sell that vision to his funders, Omaha Steaks among them."

#### KEEPING PEOPLE FED

The family's nuanced understanding of the arts – what they contribute and what they need to thrive – explains why Omaha Steaks support has remained in force throughout the pandemic.

"At this moment it's really important for us and for other sponsors and supporters to stick with these arts organizations through this disruptive period," Todd said. "Even though they haven't been able to present in-person, the organizations need to be sustained so that when we come out of this we have as strong or stronger of an arts culture than when the pandemic began."

"Our community and national support goes beyond the arts.

Particularly during the pandemic we're involved in both disaster relief efforts and hunger relief efforts on a national scale. We did disaster relief with the Salvation Army for the hurricanes in Texas and Louisiana. We did hunger relief with Feeding America both by donating food and by raising money through promotions with our customers and our employees. That was millions of meals. So not only are we interested in lifting peoples spirits but making sure we can help fill their stomachs as well."

The Simons' intentionality around philanthropy is their guide star.

"Even though different individuals in the family have different interests and different profiles out front on these matters, I think this whole thing happens because our family works together to make it happen."



*Eve Simon at Opera Omaha's 2018 Gala*



*Fred Simon, one of Opera Omaha's Founders and greatest champions*



*Todd and Betiana Simon at Opera Omaha's 2018 Gala*

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# A legacy that brings beauty, art and opera to future generations.

## FORTISSIMO SOCIETY

We are honored by the selfless generosity of our Fortissimo Society members who, through their estate plans, will continue to support Opera Omaha's productions, education and engagement efforts, past their own lifetimes. We invite you to join this esteemed group of individuals who have demonstrated their deep commitment to the future cultural vibrancy of our region.

We proudly recognize the following Fortissimo Society Members

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We are grateful to the following individuals who designated a portion of their estate to support Opera Omaha, upon their passing.

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We thank the donors who have established restricted funds to honor a family, friend and loved one. These named funds provide important ongoing support through Opera Omaha's endowment.

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For more information, please contact Opera Omaha at 402.661.8435 or email [kflayhart@operaomaha.org](mailto:kflayhart@operaomaha.org).

\*Deceased



## Fortissimo Society Member Spotlight: RICHARD AND MARY PARRISH

Richard Parrish was just ten years old when he fell in love with opera.

"I was an army brat," explained Richard. "My family was living in Germany for two years. One of my schoolteachers talked about opera and suggested that I attend one. I thought to myself: why not? I went home and asked my parents to take me - and I have been hooked on opera ever since. It's just the perfect form of entertainment."

Although opera may be the first love Richard found in Germany, it was not his last. As a young soldier, Richard was stationed in Germany where he met the greatest love of his life: his wife, Mary.

Mary - having completed her bachelor's degree in music at Wayne State University - was in Germany on a two-year contract with the U.S. Army Service Club in Stuttgart and Hanau. After just three months since their first meeting, having completed her contract, Mary returned home to Detroit, Michigan. What could have been the end of their romance turned out to be just the beginning.

"My friends in Germany told me that Richard was pining away for me," recalled Mary. "Somehow he managed to get a leave during the holidays to come visit me in Detroit. He proposed on that trip!"

Newlyweds, Richard and Mary returned overseas for two more years and traveled as much as they could. After Richard was discharged from the service, the couple settled in Detroit and Richard earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at Wayne State University.

"That's really when our opera appreciation began," explained Mary. "The Metropolitan Opera toured in those days and we were so fortunate to see some really spectacular operas—Pavarotti and Sutherland in *Daughter of the Regiment*, Elizabeth Schwarzkopf in *Rosenkavalier*, for example. My first opera was *Salome* with Leonie Rysanek."

In 1978, Richard and Mary relocated to Omaha when Richard accepted the position of Corporate Economist at Northern Natural Gas. Mary's professional career also thrived in Omaha. In 1979, she joined Valmont Industries and eventually became the International Logistics Manager of the company's Irrigation Division. "It was not easy to find a job," recalled Mary. "I faced a lot of discrimination [as a woman]. I remember with my friend, Bob Armstrong, who as a Black man faced more discrimination than I, having long discussions. He always told me to stay strong - that I would find the right job. And I did. I absolutely loved my role at Valmont. I was one of the first women promoted to management. It was a wonderful job and a wonderful company - I was there for 31 years."

"Success isn't only the result of hard work-people have to be given chances. I can't emphasize that enough. Richard and I were lucky to have been given opportunities."

Richard and Mary are incredibly grateful for their professional success that has enabled them to



Mary and Richard Parrish with the grand Baldwin piano they donated to Opera Omaha's Leavenworth Studio.

support the art that is so close to their hearts. Their generosity has helped enrich the lives of thousands of people. "We are very fortunate to be able to give back—we contribute to many diverse arts organizations in Omaha as well as the Metropolitan Opera and Broadway Cares. Opera Omaha has earned an incredible national reputation for its work. We are especially supportive of the efforts to promote new, diverse artists, and are so pleased that the company is focusing on these aspects and bringing them to the public with virtual programming. It has been wonderful to see and participate in these events during our isolation at home and we are looking forward to live events in the future," said Mary.

One of the best things in life that happened was donating a Baldwin grand piano to Opera Omaha. Mary's father was one of 11 children of a second-generation German family that was very musically inclined. Her grandparents had very little money but owned a Steinway spinet. Whenever the family would gather, they would sing around the piano.

"I began piano lessons when I was 8, practicing on my grandparents' piano, and my first piano was a Baldwin upright. I loved that piano. It was such a proud moment to be able to give Opera Omaha a gift that meant so much to us."

By joining Opera Omaha's planned giving society, the Fortissimo Society, Richard and Mary have created a legacy that will help ensure future generations are able to experience the art they love.

"Communities need to have their own opera companies," stated Richard. "There is nothing more perfect than seeing opera in person - it fulfills your life and should be shared. There is nothing like it - its breathtaking visuals, the drama, the music - it's magic. It is our hope that our gift to Opera Omaha will enable more people to experience all of the beauty of opera in person for years to come."

For more information about Opera Omaha's Fortissimo Society, please contact Karen Flayhart, Director of Development, at [kflayhart@operaomaha.org](mailto:kflayhart@operaomaha.org) or 402.661.8435.



# ARTISTS FIRST SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Honoring the artists who make great opera possible

Omaha values excellence and artistry. Opera Omaha embodies this community value by bringing world-class singers and artists to the stage each season. In honor of these talented individuals, Opera Omaha was pleased to introduce this season the Company's *Artists First* sponsorship program, comprised of a committed group of individuals, corporations and foundations whose financial investment directly underwrites the company's operatic singers and artistic personnel.

Supporting artists has long been an essential tenet of Opera Omaha. During what has been an exceptionally difficult time for the industry, Opera Omaha has been a beacon of hope for artists – many who have lost their livelihoods due to the spread of Covid-19. We wish to recognize and thank this season's *Artist First* contributors for their great generosity that has enabled Opera Omaha to deepen its relationships with the talented artists, deliver breath-taking digital works and bring the art we love safely back to the live stage this spring.

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For more information about the Artists First sponsorship program including associated benefits that bring you closer to the art and the artists, please contact Karen Flayhart, Director of Development, at 402.661.8435 or email [kflayhart@operaomaha.org](mailto:kflayhart@operaomaha.org).

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La bohème

**1979-80**  
Die Fledermaus\*  
La Traviata\*  
The Pirates of Penzance

**1980-81**  
Così fan tutte  
Susannah  
Rigoletto

**1981-82**  
The Daughter of the Regiment  
Carmen  
The Magic Flute

**1982-83**  
Don Pasquale  
Faust  
Madama Butterfly

**1983-84**  
Aida\*  
The Tales of Hoffmann  
Don Giovanni

**1984-85**  
Tosca  
Falstaff  
Gianni Schicchi/Pagliacci

**1985-86**  
Turandot  
Lucia di Lammermoor  
The Marriage of Figaro

**1986-87**  
La Traviata  
The Barber of Seville  
Porgy and Bess

**1987-88**  
The Turn of the Screw\*  
The Juniper Tree\*  
Where's Dick?  
Amahl & the Night Visitors\*  
Carmen  
La bohème

**1988-89**  
Oklahoma!  
Partenope\*  
The Diary of One Who Vanished  
White Rose  
A Celebration of Bel Canto  
Rigoletto  
Manon

**1989-90**  
Plácido Domingo in Concert  
Show Boat  
Madama Butterfly  
Romeo and Juliet\*

**1990-91**  
Carousel  
Angelina Reaux in “Stranger Here Myself”  
Maria Padilla†  
The Golem\*  
Il Trovatore\*  
The Magic Flute

**1991-92**  
My Fair Lady  
Tosca  
Don Giovanni\*

**1992-93**  
Ermione\*  
The Gardens of Adonis\*\*\*  
Autumn Valentine\*\*\*  
Eugene Onegin\*  
The Flying Dutchman

**1993-94**  
Vive Toulouse!  
Requiem Variations\*\*\*  
Fidelio  
The Pirates of Penzance

**1994-95**  
The Merry Widow  
La Traviata  
Carmen

**1995-96**  
The Daughter of the Regiment\*  
Turandot  
The Barber of Seville

**1996-97**  
Così fan tutte\*  
La bohème  
Faust

**1997-98**  
Don Pasquale  
Madama Butterfly  
La Cenerentola  
Opera Omaha 40

**1998-99**  
Eric Hermannson's Soul\*\*\*†  
Aida  
The Marriage of Figaro

**1999-00**  
Samuel Ramey in “A Date with the Devil”  
Samson et Dalila  
Tosca\*

**2000-01**  
Amahl & the Night Visitors\*  
Carmina Burana/Pagliacci  
Falstaff  
Man of La Mancha

**2001-02**  
All-American! Concert  
Amahl & the Night Visitors  
Otello  
Little Women  
Don Giovanni

**2002-03**  
Richard Rodgers' America Concert  
Carmen  
The Turn of the Screw\*  
H.M.S. Pinafore  
Bloodlines\*\*\*†

**2003-04**  
La bohème  
Lucia di Lammermoor  
Cold Sassy Tree\*

**2004-05**  
The Threepenny Opera\*  
The Tender Land\*  
Dream of the Pacific\*\*\*†  
Turandot  
La Traviata

**2005-06**  
Paul Bunyan  
Madama Butterfly\*  
The Abduction from the Seraglio\*

**2006-07**  
Tosca  
Wakonda's Dream\*\*\*†  
The Barber of Seville

**2007-08**  
All The King's Men\*  
The Tragedy of Carmen\*  
Aida\*

**2008-09**  
The Blizzard Voices\*\*\*†  
The Pirates of Penzance  
La bohème

**2009-10**  
Night for American Song  
Pagliacci  
Brundibár  
The Marriage of Figaro  
So in Love with Broadway\*

**2010-11**  
Opera for the Cure\*  
Don Giovanni  
Madama Butterfly

**2011-12**  
This is Opera!\*  
Hansel and Gretel\*  
The Marriage Contract\*  
The Mikado

**2012-13**  
La Traviata  
The Magic Flute\*  
Bluebeard's Castle\*

**2013-14**  
Opera Outdoors\*  
Carmen  
Agrippina\*  
La cenerentola

**2014-15**  
Opera Outdoors\*  
Rigoletto\*  
A Flowering Tree\*  
Fidelio

**2015-16**  
Opera Outdoors\*  
The Barber of Seville  
La fanciulla del West  
Semele\*

**2016-17**  
Opera Outdoors\*  
La bohème  
Così fan tutte\*  
Flight\*  
Stranger from Paradise\*\*\*†

**2017-18**  
Opera Outdoors\*  
Tosca\*  
Falstaff\*  
Medea\*  
Proving Up\*†  
ONE Festival\*\*\*

**2018-19**  
Opera Outdoors\*  
Pagliacci  
The Elixir of Love (L'elisir d'amore)  
Les Enfants Terribles\*  
Faust\*\*  
ONE Festival\*\*\*

**2019-20**  
Opera Outdoors\*  
Madama Butterfly  
The Abduction from the Seraglio\*

**2020-21**  
Opera Outdoors Broadcast  
MIRANDA\*\*\*  
MODULATION\*\*\*  
Bizet, Mahler and Chausson  
Opera Under the Stars\*

\* New production  
+ American Premiere  
\*\*\* World Premiere  
† Commissioned Work

Without the dedication and perseverance of outstanding volunteers and support groups, our productions would not be as beautiful, our bottom line would not be as sound, and our sense of community would not be as strong. For these, and many other reasons, we extend a heartfelt thank you to the following organizations.

We invite you to get involved and become a volunteer or member of one of our support groups. For more information about the following opportunities, please visit: [www.operaomaha.org/get-involved](http://www.operaomaha.org/get-involved) or email [opera@operaomaha.org](mailto:opera@operaomaha.org).

#### OPERA OMAHA GUILD

The Opera Omaha Guild is a dedicated group of men and women who actively support Opera Omaha's fundraising and community engagement and education activities. Members plan and promote events such as Cotillion (etiquette classes for area sixth graders), social luncheons, educational activities, opera study groups and pre-performance parties. If you are interested in joining the Opera Omaha Guild please call us at (402) 346-7372 or visit our website for additional information.

#### CRAFTSMAN'S GUILD

Integral to Opera Omaha's success since 1962, the Craftsman's Guild members donate stagecraft skills in the areas of wardrobe, makeup/wigs, concessions, and parties. Focused on meeting the backstage needs of guest artists and the production, members enjoy the camaraderie and reward of helping to create top notch performances for the Omaha community.

#### VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers help Opera Omaha complete essential tasks like assisting with community events, ushering at concerts, or providing additional office support. It is clear without their help, Opera Omaha would not be able to bring world class opera to Omaha stages or into the community. Students can also fulfill required community service hours for groups like National Honor Society by volunteering with Opera Omaha. For more information, please fill out the inquiry form at [operaomaha.org](http://operaomaha.org).

#### SUPERNUMERARIES

Supernumeraries appear on stage in non-speaking, non-singing roles, much like being an extra in a movie. Being a "super" takes some time and patience, but is a lot of fun and a great learning experience. Super roles are varied but might include servants, soldiers, peasants, priests and priestesses, dancers, bartenders, waiters, ragamuffins, pickpockets, and sometimes even animals! All ages, including children, are needed.

#### OPERA OMAHA CHORUS

The Opera Omaha Chorus is comprised of professional singers from Omaha, Lincoln and surrounding communities. Please contact the Company for the next audition date. You must be at least 18 years old to audition. Prospective candidates will be assigned a time slot and asked to present two selections: one in a foreign language, one in English, and neither selection can exceed five minutes in total. Arias, art songs, or church solos are all acceptable as audition pieces. Please provide printed music for the accompanist, who will be available at no cost.

#### TWEET SEATS

Social media savvy people with great knowledge of the Twitterverse attend the final dress rehearsal of each opera and tweet throughout the production offering real-time reviews of the productions before opening night.

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